



Helen Dalton MP
MEMBER FOR MURRAY

Easter Newsletter



Autumn 2020



Water debates create a splash

On 27 February, I introduced the first ever bill in Australian history that would force politicians to declare their water interests, and to create a state water register of individuals and corporations (foreign and domestic) who own our most valuable natural resource.

Later that same day, I presented a 11,000-strong petition – organised by rural community group Speak Up – to parliament demanding a national water register and federal royal commission.

It absolutely rocked the establishment.

First, an anonymous National Party MP tried to stop the debates happening, alleging I had a conflict of interest. In essence, he or she said that because I'm a farmer, I shouldn't be advocating for farmers.

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Overcoming COVID-19

At the time of printing in mid-March, the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) was starting to change people's lives. I suspect things may have gotten a lot worse by the time you read this newsletter.

Daily life may be challenging for some time, but I'm confident we as a community can get through this period.

I'd urge you all to follow the advice of health experts to limit the spread of the virus.

If you have any questions, you can call the Coronavirus Health Information Line on 1800 020 080 or look for information on <https://www.health.gov.au/>.

My Facebook page Helen Dalton MP will also provide regular updates relevant to the Murrumbidgee and Far West regions. If the NSW Government instructs us to close our offices, I'll do my best to put alternative arrangements in place to help those who need our assistance.

I'm very concerned about the impact this will have on our region – both on our already overstretched medical facilities; and on farms, businesses and workers still recovering from drought and bad water policy.

Shops closing down and festivals being cancelled may be necessary for health reasons, but I appreciate how this will really hurt struggling employers, employees and families.

Rest assured, I'll be lobbying as hard as I can to ensure government gives us all we need to cope with this challenge.

I believe cash grants for those who lose income when not working are essential. Other measures – such as special funding for hospitals and school infrastructure and payroll tax exemptions – need to be put in place to protect fragile rural economies.

This Newsletter updates you on everything I've done this year so far. I'm pleased to have introduced an historic new bill to end water secrecy; and to report on some progress in health, education and rural services.

Please stay safe, stay informed and keep your distance from others when needed. My best wishes to you and your family.

- Helen Dalton MP

From front page...

The anonymous MP then tried to have me impeached for the same offence, by reporting me to the ethics committee.

He or she failed. The NSW Speaker dismissed the complaint, and allowed me to introduce my Bill and the petition.

This just shows how terrified some politicians are of lifting the secrecy on water ownership.

Secrecy is the mother of corruption and mismanagement. While politicians and big corporations can continue to own water in secret, we'll never solve our water woes.

Our movement cannot be stopped. I'd like to thank every one of the 11,000 people who signed the Speak Up petition. We will keep fighting until a water register becomes law.

Please follow my Facebook page Helen Dalton MP to see how my Bill progresses in Parliament.



■ Dr Maxwell Hopp and Helen.

Taking action against bad behaviour

Since my election in March, my office has been inundated with complaints about Murrumbidgee Local Health District, NSW Department of Education, various other government departments, private irrigation companies and some councils.

I'm hearing a lot about alleged management bullying, corruption, gagging, neglect and mistreatment of our most vulnerable residents.

Wherever possible, I have taken your complaints directly to the relevant Ministers and oversight bodies to ask for investigations or disciplinary action.

But I've been met with a brick wall. It seems this government is determined to turn a blind eye to wrongdoing.

I refuse to give up. What I need from you is a bit more support and information. The more evidence you give me, the harder it is for Ministers to ignore the issues.

If you can provide a short summary of your complaint (one page or less), including specific dates, names and locations – that would be greatly appreciated.

Any supporting information you have; including statutory declarations, roster information, records, letters and photos, would be even better.

If you're prepared to tell your story to the media, that often sparks action. The NSW Government reversed their attempts to shut down much loved Associate Professor Maxwell Hopp's Griffith children's allergy clinic as soon as we raised the issue with the press. Our office can help you make the connections.

While many managers, councillors and bureaucrats across Murray do a fantastic job, I would dearly love to support you in rooting out corruption and bad behaviour wherever it exists.

Email my office at murray@parliament.nsw.gov.au for more information or to provide your evidence.




■ Helen with Speak Up supporters before petition debate.



■ Helen with Dairy Farmer and Speak Up Vice Chair Lachie Marshall.

Follow Helen Dalton

 Helen Dalton MP or visit www.helendalton.com.au

Jones vows to fight for Murray on Water, Health and Education

Love him or hate him, Alan Jones has been a great advocate for the bush during the drought.

He has a big influence over government and knows how to get things done.

In October, Alan's intervention got the government to finally provide a desperately needed 3000mg/l 'special purpose' allocation for West Corrgan stock and domestic water supplies.

Alan got in touch with me around this time to tell me he was delighted to finally see a farmer in parliament, fighting for rural NSW.

I've since appeared on both his high-rating Sydney 2GB morning show as well as his evening Sky News TV show. He expressed strong support for my Water Register Bill.

In both interviews, I highlighted the desperate need for our farmers to get a decent water allocation this year. I also told him about the downgrading of our



■ Alan Jones - Peta Credlin, Helen Dalton and Alan Jones and the Fox TV studios in Sydney.

hospitals and teacher shortages in our schools.

Alan has asked me to keep him informed of everything that's happening in Murray.

He's vowed to keep hassling government to save our farmers and restore our small towns.

Wentworth and Balranald deserve to be represented

After I was elected, I was astonished to learn two of the biggest areas in the state – Wentworth and Balranald Local Government Area (LGA) – don't get their own representation.

As the state member for Murray, I only get allocated two offices – in Griffith and Deniliquin. That means if you're in Wentworth, the closest state MP office is 402km away, to Deniliquin.

If you live in Sydney, you could probably drive to at least 10 state MP offices to seek help from problems. But if you live in Wentworth, you need to drive four hours to find one. I don't find that acceptable, so I set up a part-time office in Wentworth which I fund in part from my electoral allowance. But one part-timer cannot be expected to cover an area of 47,962 square km by themselves.

I've now made two submissions to the Parliamentary Remuneration Tribunal urging them to provide a proper MP office for Wentworth and Balranald, with three full-time staff – the same as I have in Griffith and Deniliquin.

These two LGAs are among the most disadvantaged areas of the state, and face a number of problems that deserve a physical



■ Helen Dalton in Wentworth to congratulate Ashton Cowling for his Royal Agriculture Society of NSW award.

presence to address. Wentworth has just lost their last remaining doctor. Balranald has just had their council put into administration; and will have no elected councillors until 2024.

Both LGAs have several health, education, and infrastructure and policing issues that are covered by different state bureaucracies to those that cover the rest of my electorate, so require on-the-ground expertise.

The Parliamentary Remuneration Tribunal will decide by June whether Wentworth and Balranald deserve the same representation as the rest of the state. I hope they make the right decision.

Hay safe house for domestic violence victims

Domestic and family violence has been a big issue in Australia over the past few months. Women, children and men escaping violence in rural areas face the biggest challenge.

In the town of Hay, for example, the nearest safe house for a person fleeing violence is a two-hour drive away, in Griffith. Imagine trying to do that at night on our kangaroo-plagued roads?

Fortunately, we have wonderful community members who recognise a problem and tried to solve it. Hay volunteer group Community Action for Suicide Elimination (CASE) has put forward a case to convert the now unused Public Works building in Hay into a safe house.

CASE has offered to manage and staff the facility. The community group just needs a small amount of government funding to renovate and upgrade the dormant building. This community proposal appears to be a win-win. An un-used building would be utilised for something for which there is a great community need.

I accompanied CASE Chairman Bob Dougall in a visit to Minister for Families and Community Services Gareth Ward in October, when Mr Dougall pleaded his case to the Minister. Minister Ward appeared moved by Mr Dougall's case, and promised to investigate what could be done. Fingers crossed we will see this happen.



Birthday and celebration card requests

Everyone loves a milestone! If you'd like a birthday, anniversary or congratulations card from me to someone special in Murray, I'm happy to write one. Just email my office at murray@parliament.nsw.gov.au with the name, age, special date, mailing address and any other relevant info on the person you'd like me to wish, and I'll send it on. Please provide as much notice as you can before the special date.

Griffith super school needs two principals and teacher incentives

A recent report on the Murrumbidgee Regional High School merger revealed what we all know. Former Education Minister Adrian Piccoli's poorly planned and underfunded merging of Griffith's two only high schools has been a disaster.

Only 23 per cent of teachers are satisfied at the schools, down from 52 per cent before the Piccoli merger. Overall in Australia, 81 per cent of teachers like their job. Our students are not getting the promised increase in subject choice. In fact, sometimes they're lucky to get teachers at all. A chronic staff shortage has seen hundreds of missed classes over the past 16 months. The teachers are doing their best, but morale has plummeted. This can't go on any longer.

It was good to host Education Minister Sarah Mitchell in March to meet teachers, students and parents. The message to her was clear. Her Government must fix this, now.

What we need is a school principal at each school site – Wade and Griffith. The school is too big and too spread apart for one person to manage. And we need to provide incentives for teachers to come to Griffith, to address the staff shortage. This includes more pay and rent subsidy – which is what teachers in surrounding towns like Leeton and Darlington Point receive.

Our children deserve the same standard of schooling as those in Sydney. If you agree, make sure you message the Education Minister and let her know: www.nsw.gov.au/your-government/ministers/minister-for-education-and-early-childhood-learning/

Department of Education backflips on Yanco Detention Camp

Late last year, a number of parents wrote to me concerned about the state of the girls dorms at the wonderful Yanco Agricultural High School. I immediately went and visited the campus. I thought I'd landed on a Nauru detention camp.

Back in 1993, the NSW Government put up shabby, demountable, temporary dorms for girls residing at Yanco Agricultural

High School. They promised they'd build a permanent structure soon. Some 27 years later, the daughters of those Yanco Ag's female students are still waiting. They sleep in cramped, hazardous temporary dorms, where the temperatures reach 48 degrees in summer.

When I asked the Education Minister about it, she told me the dorms "meet the needs"

of the female students. So, I ramped up the pressure in parliament and in the media. The story was even picked up by Sydney's Daily Telegraph. The Education Minister immediately changed her tune. She's now conceded that a new permanent dorm must be built.

Let's keep up the pressure until we see it happen.



Need for mental health service in our hospitals

It's great to see the NSW Government start work on a new Griffith Base Hospital. We have needed a new hospital for decades, but losing this seat to me has finally sparked the NSW Government into action.

However, we still need to keep fighting to ensure the new hospital includes all the services we deserve. It really concerns me that there are no plans for a mental health unit at the hospital.

The Murrumbidgee has the highest suicide rate in NSW. Yet we also have the fewest mental health services in the state. None of our hospitals – not even Deniliquin – have proper mental health facilities.

When people suffer from mental illnesses, we're forced to travel two to three hours to the nearest hospital for treatment away from their families and support networks.



■ Helen Dalton at Wagga protest for better health services.

This is totally unacceptable. If you've got ideas on how to address this mental health crisis, please let me know. In the meantime, let's keep the pressure on.

If you believe our hospitals deserve proper mental health facilities, please write to our NSW Health Minister Brad Hazzard and let him know: <https://www.bradhazzard.com.au/contact/>

Recognising fabulous achievements in my Murray electorate

It's been my pleasure to recognise some fabulous achievements from people and groups across Murray in NSW Parliament this year. Below is a list of some amazing contributions to our community from across the electorate. If you know of someone or a group that deserves recognition, please email my office at murray@parliament.nsw.gov.au with your suggestions.

NAME	TOWN	ACHIEVEMENT
John Smith	Coleambally	46 years in the Coleambally Rural Fire Service, 15 years as Captain before becoming Group Captain. He has fought many large fires and has been at the forefront of recruiting young people as well as overseeing a cadetship at Coleambally Central School.
Ian 'Trunky' Troy	Barham	Trunky has dedicated 43 years of service to the Murray River Council and Wakool Shire. He also brought about changes to equipment which were of great benefit.
John Robinson	Griffith	Outstanding service to his community for more than half a century both as a school teacher and a volunteer for Griffith's Pioneer Park.
Ben Johnstone	Balranald	An inspiring young 14-year old who has been re-elected as deputy mayor for the Balranald Youth Council. He was also selected to represent his region in the NSW Regional Youth Taskforce.
Margaret Moore	Griffith	Margaret is Citizen of the Year this year. She works tirelessly in the community helping to raise funds for a variety of local organisations. She is also the lady behind Pink Up Griffith for breast cancer research.
Balranald Central School	Balranald	Alison Linnett created the opportunity for her students K-6 to sew Aussie Hero Quilts and thus making a difference in the lives of our servicemen and women.
Leeton Community Op Shop	Leeton	The Op Shop workers provide a wonderful day to day business as well as many welfare services which greatly benefits those in the community who are suffering or in need.
Pam Ellerman	Deniliquin	Pam is a long-time member and Chair of the Deniliquin LHAC. Pam has led some great initiatives for the benefit of the community with her endless enthusiasm and commitment.



■ Helen with John Robinson with his award for Outstanding service to his community for more than half a century both as a school teacher and a volunteer for Griffith's Pioneer Park.



■ Helen with Jane Gibbs who was nominated as my local woman of the year for her extraordinary 20 years of community service – including fostering over 100 children and spending a decade working with children with a disability.

Fight for proper services at Deniliquin hospital



■ Nurses Union Representatives Zoe-Anne Guinea and Rhonda Dixon with Dr Marion Magee and Helen.

In March, I joined with some passionate locals and union representatives to present the government with some Deniliquin hospital issues that urgently need to be addressed:

- 1) While government keeps telling us they can't get nurses to move out here, in actual fact they are creating barriers for employment.

A "fit for work" test – requiring nurses and midwives to pass an online health assessment with no feedback or review if they fail the test – provides no transparency. It has already seen at least three agency midwives and one permanent midwife prevented from working here.

The Murrumbidgee Local Health District is the only location in NSW that requires this external "fit for work" barrier, even though we struggle the most to attract quality staff. I asked for this policy to be immediately reviewed.

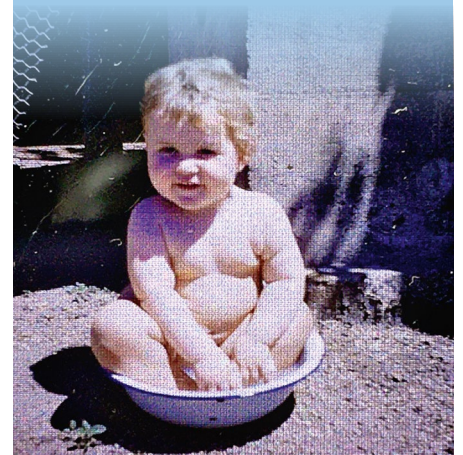
- 2) A blanket NSW Health policy prevents Deniliquin Hospital from keeping children on the site for more than 48 hours at a time. This means that sick or severely injured children may have to travel several hours for treatment. This policy should also be reviewed immediately. Deniliquin Hospital needs to provide a dedicated space for treating children, and consult with local paediatricians to improve its service for children.

- 3) A midwife should be rostered on for each shift, 24 hours a day, seven days a week – to address complications with babies that may arise at any time. The maternity ward should not have to rely on general nursing staff when there are no midwives rostered on overnight.
- 4) The hospital needs and was promised a new CT Scanner. I've asked for a timeline on when this will be delivered.
- 5) A Safe Assessment Room should be incorporated into new hospital plans. Deniliquin hospital is supposed to be a mental health hub, but there is no suitable place for such assessments.
- 6) The oncology department needs two qualified staff members to be on the ward at all times.
- 7) Rural GPs need to be properly compensated for compulsory Murrumbidgee Local Health District (MLHD) training.
- 8) A Paediatric bed/cot should be available in the Emergency Department when required and must meet national standards.
- 9) Nurses and Midwives are being forced to work excessive hours and back-to-back shifts. Workloads must be reviewed to ensure nurses and midwives are not burnt out.
- 10) Subsidised child care or child care facilities should be considered as a means of attracting and retaining staff.

Helen Dalton - Four Truths and a Lie

Here's some things about Helen you may not know. But one of these five facts is a lie. Can you spot which one? The first person to email the correct answer to murray@parliament.nsw.gov.au wins a prize.

1. I was born on the exact same day as Hollywood scream queen Jamie Lee Curtis.
2. In high school, I pushed my best friend down the stairs of the school stage, but never told my parents!
3. I used to bathe my four children in the one bath.
4. I once scored 103 not out in a primary school girl's cricket match.
5. My weirdest habit is walking around the house with my shoelaces undone.



■ Helen in 1961 with her first water asset.

Many thanks to Shirlee Burge, Dr Marion Magee and Nurses Union reps Zoe-Anne Guinea and Rhonda Dixon for attending the meeting and providing valuable input on what needs to be done.

I believe we need a community campaign to lobby for a proper expansion of Deniliquin hospital and services. But in the short-term, the above issues can be addressed, some for minimal or no cost. I will meet again with government in the near future and update you on progress.

Making headlines

I've been told the best way to get government to do something is to pressure them in the media. They hate seeing headlines of rural neglect. Here's a number that we have generated this year, drawing attention to our most pressing issues.

Water register 'terrifies' Nats

By Craig Brealey

The tactics being employed by the NSW Government to delay the establishment of a register of water owners showed how scared it was, MP Helen Dalton said yesterday. Mrs Dalton's bill for the register went before parliament on February 27 and the government was obstructing its progress by deliberately wasting parliament's time, said the Member for Orange.

"Last week, another unrelated bill was introduced and they're talking it to

'This is making many politicians and their corporate donors very nervous'

Report on school merger points to multiple failures

Natassia Chrysanthos

Teacher satisfaction has halved and student morale has dropped a year after two high schools merged under a "super school" model that was intended to improve choice but has instead left staff well-being at an "all-time low".

An evaluation of the 2019 mer-

leave. We had over 1000 classes uncovered last year, where kids were doing nothing with minimal supervision," she said.

"If this was happening in the city there would be an uproar."

More than half of teachers (52.2 per cent) reported being satisfied with their role at the school before the merger, but this dropped to

■ Sydney Morning Herald.

■ Barrier Daily Truth.

Dalton slams Yanco's dorms

MEMBER for Murray Helen Dalton says she was "horrified" to see the condition of female dormitories at Yanco Agricultural High School and has called on the Department of Education to act and upgrade the living quarters.

Mrs Dalton visited the school late last year said it was time for the female student living spaces to be completely overhauled.

She said her comments were not a slight on staff, rather the department's "lack of movement".

Female students have been living in demountable buildings for more than two decades after they were originally placed there as a temporary option. "The conditions are hot and and, in some cases, won't be giving up Mrs Dalton said.



UPGRADE: Helen Dalton has called for demountables to be overhauled.

■ Leeton Irrigator.

WATER CHALLENGE

Farmer tells MPs: declare your holdings

■ Sydney Morning Herald.

Petition garners support

By Craig Brealey

Labor will back a petition that seeks to reveal who owns shares in the water market, said Clayton Barr, the NSW Shadow Minister for Water.

tell us that if you are not doing the wrong thing, then you have nothing to worry about. Well, the same goes for them," he said.

"If they have nothing to hide, then full openness and transparency should not be a worry for them.

Lakes.

"2. NSW Government petition the Federal Government to establish a Public National Water Register to increase the transparency of water ownership across the Basin."

■ The Land.



Member for Murray, Shooters, Fishers and Farmers' Helen Dalton submitting the Speak Up 4 Water petition for a national water register and royal commission. Photo supplied.

Water petition makes a splash

Dormitory dump

WHILE girls boarding at Yanco Agricultural High School sweat it out in adequate dormitories, member for Murray Helen Dalton has turned up the heat to have the situation resolved.

Mrs Dalton has described the demountable, temporary dormitories originally built on-site in 1993 as "shabby, cramped and hazardous".

She said the new permanent structures promised by the NSW Government had never materialized.

with great staff and students.

"I intend to put the heat on the Department and Minister until they learn third world accommodation is not acceptable for our female students," she said.

The "villages" were placed on the school grounds in 1993 with the NSW Government direction they were to be used as temporary accommodation, and now house 45 per cent of the school's female students.

■ The Land.

■ Narrandera Argus.

Push to reveal water owners

Petition reaches 10,000 signatures

BY OLIVIA CALVER

A PETITION for a national water register and royal commission into the Murray Darling Basin Plan, is set to spark debate in NSW Parliament next week.

ping up water."

Mrs Dalton said she understood privacy was an issue, but personally she had been very happy to declare her water ownership.

"I bought a fantastic irrigation farm that didn't have

manent ownership of water if you had the owner's Water Access Licence (WAL) number.

"You can register as a broker to look at those WAL

Petition challenges state to expose 'water barons'

EAN HIGGINS
NATIONAL RURAL REPORTER

The NSW government will be forced to debate whether to expose the identities of "water barons" allegedly secretly profiteering from farmers during the drought by driving up the price of water for irrigation.

Shooters, Fishers and Farmers MP Helen Dalton submitted a petition to state parliament on Tuesday of 10,000 signatures in support

Under NSW law, 10,000 signatures is the trigger for a compulsory parliamentary debate on a petition, and it has been scheduled for February 27.

During the debate, Water Minister Melinda Pavey will be required under the rules of parliament to state the government's position on the petition.

The move is likely to wedge the Liberal-Nationals Coalition state

■ The Australian.

School dormitories more like 'Nauru'

JAKE McCALLUM

FEMALE students at a prestigious agricultural boarding school in the state's southwest are sweltering in demountable dormitories while

ing 27 years for the NSW Government to upgrade the demountable facilities at the school, where it costs up to \$13,000 a year to board.

At times they have been forced to sleep elsewhere due to the heat.

ment facilities for our female students are hindering enrolment numbers," Mr Whyte said.

"The boys are given basic facilities but theirs is secure, fire safe, it is reasonable and comfortable."

■ Daily Telegraph.



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