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## Touring the region

Swan Hill Guardian, Swan Hill



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### Touring the region

I'VE spent four days back home in the Mallee.

Through Mildura, Swan Hill and surrounding towns I was listening, learning and reconnecting.

Swan Hill is where I was raised and every time I return, I'm reminded of the values that shaped me: hard work and a deep sense of care for community.

The other towns might not be where I grew up, but they share the same grit, resilience and quiet determination.

In Mildura and Swan Hill small business owners spoke plainly.

They told me what keeps them up at night: the costs of running a business, too much red tape, and not enough workers to get the job done.

Behind the workforce shortages lies a deeper challenge; attracting people to live in regional towns, finding enough housing and making sure essential services can keep up with growing demand.

This is why Labor is stepping up with practical support: up to \$800 in energy bill relief for businesses, and an extension of the \$20,000 instant asset write-off so local operators can invest in the tools they need and claim it back straight away.

These are not handouts, they are lifelines for people who keep our towns running.

Labor is also investing in housing supply, building more homes with a focus on regional growth. Initiatives like the \$10 billion Housing Australia Future Fund are building 40,000 more social and affordable homes.

We're also making it easier for first home buyers to get into the market with five per cent deposits that will help more families put roots down in the regions.

I spent time with students at Swan Hill College. They are curious, ambitious and determined, and they spoke about their futures with honesty and courage.

Listening to them took me back to when I was in those same classrooms. Looking to the past, I can see how far we've come and reminded me why investing in young people is so important.

That's why Labor is fully and fairly funding public schools because every child in the Mallee deserves the opportunity to build the life they want just like the kids in the cities.

I also visited the Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council, people who have come from across the world to make the Mallee home.

Sitting with community leaders, I heard about the work they do welcoming new families, helping people navigate services, and celebrating culture.

It was clear to me that they are not only

contributing, they are essential. They are picking fruit, keeping hospitals going, running small shops, and volunteering at the local footy club.

Nearly a quarter of Swan Hill residents were born overseas. In Robinvale, it is almost half the town. These communities are woven into the fabric of our region. They are what make us better.

And yet some politicians still reach for the old playbook, blaming migration for housing shortages. But here in the Mallee, migration is not a problem. It is the reason crops are harvested, shops are open, and families have a doctor to go to.

Here is the contradiction. Nationals politicians know this. They quietly lobby for more visas and seasonal worker programs, even as they rail against immigration when the cameras are on. People here can see through that. They know their towns need more families, not fewer.

Labor is listening and acting. We are delivering tax cuts, cheaper medicines and helping families move closer to home ownership.

While the Coalition is busy fighting amongst themselves, Labor will keep delivering on what people say matters.

There is still work to do. Infrastructure, education and services in the Mallee need attention, but this week gave me hope in the students ready to lead, in the small businesses who keep going despite the challenges, and in the multicultural communities who show us every day what resilience looks like.

With 112 nationalities represented in Mildura, it was a privilege to celebrate the local citizenship ceremony and welcome 29 new Australians.

Among them, was Sam Dhawan, who runs three businesses in Mildura and first joined us at the small business roundtable during our visit.

Sam is one of many who prove that when people are given a chance to contribute, they do so with heart and hustle.

Spending time in the towns that raised me and the communities that shaped me reminds me why I do this job.

It's not for the noise in Canberra but for the truths spoken in the Mallee.

It's so, a young person in Swan Hill can see a future for themselves, so a retailer in Mildura can keep growing their business, and so families across the region can build a secure future.

That is what I heard this week. And that is what will guide me to keep delivering for this region, long after the headlines move on.

**Jana Stewart**  
Victorian Senator