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REGIONAL UNIS READY TO PLAY THEIR ROLE IN DRIVING INNOVATION

The Labor Party's innovation statement announced by Senator Kim Carr today reaffirms the central role played by universities in driving ongoing prosperity across the nation, particularly in regional areas.

While welcoming many aspects of the overall policy statement, Regional Universities Network Chair Professor David Battersby singled out some of the policies as being of particular importance to regional Australia.

"The proposal to establish a Centre for Rural and Regional Futures would offer an opportunity for regional universities to fulfil their full potential in helping to develop regional economies," Professor Battersby said.

"RUN members are among the most responsive universities to local needs, and already embedded in regional communities. This means RUN members are ideally placed to drive advances in the targeted areas of better food production and food security as well as improved agriculture and regional competitiveness.

"We are already undertaking much of the Australian work done in these areas and welcome the chance to apply our expertise more widely."

Professor Battersby also welcomed promised funding in the innovation statement that would examine ways to widen access to tertiary education for students from regional, rural and remote areas.

"Our universities have pioneered a range of extremely successful higher education access schemes that enable low socio-economic status, regional and remote students, first-in-family, mature-aged and Indigenous students to participate and succeed. However, financial as well as educational barriers remain and a range of policy responses are needed to lift participation of regional students in higher education.

"Should a Labor Government be re-elected, RUN would welcome working with it to implement these and other initiatives."

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