

2018
Election Platform

BUILDING A STRONGER SOUTH AUSTRALIA



MASTER BUILDERS
SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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1 WHO WE ARE

Master Builders Association of South Australia Inc ("Master Builders SA") was established in 1884 as the peak body representing South Australia's building and construction industry.

Master Builders SA is an apolitical organisation committed to building a productive industry and a prosperous South Australian community and economy. The Association works with governments at all levels and is represented on many statutory committees and working parties.

The South Australian building and construction industry directly employs more than 65,000 South Australians across all sectors, including residential, commercial, civil engineering, land development and building and completion services. Indirectly, the industry supports tens of thousands more South Australian jobs.

The industry undertakes about \$15 billion of work every year, contributing more than \$1 for every \$7 of economic activity within the State. Indirectly, more than one-quarter of South Australia's wealth is produced by the building and construction industry.

South Australia's building and construction industry is focused on the development and transfer of skills into a life-long career. It is consistently among the leading sectors when it comes to training and apprentices and last year provided new apprentice places for more young workers than the Northern Territory, ACT and Tasmania combined.

Master Builders SA is proud of the industry it represents, the jobs it creates, the 11,000 homes it built and extended for families last year and the offices it has built for South Australian businesses.

2 INTRODUCTION

A thriving building and construction industry is essential for a strong economy. Our industry is connected to every South Australian as it creates jobs, trains apprentices, drives wider economic growth and builds better communities. However, South Australia cannot have a strong building industry if the basic economic settings are not right. We need economic policies that drive sustained business growth by creating a stable and business-friendly environment.

South Australia is undergoing significant economic transformation as demonstrated by the recent closure of General Motors Holden's Elizabeth Plant. Our state has faced some well-publicised challenges including high costs of living¹, power blackouts², closing industries³ and the nation's highest unemployment rate⁴. However, Master Builders SA is optimistic better days are ahead provided there is a positive plan for our state's future. Indeed, there has been some encouraging signs in the second half of 2017 with unemployment falling to its lowest level since 2013⁵ and small and medium businesses the most confident they have been about the economy since 2011 according to the Sensis Business Index for the September quarter⁶. In October, business confidence increased by the highest rate in the country, according to NAB's Monthly Business Survey⁷. South Australia also rose to fourth in CommSec's quarterly State of the States report⁸. The value of building and construction work done for the September 2017 Quarter was \$1.319 billion, and there has been an increase in every quarter since September 2016, when the value of work done was \$1.194 billion⁹.

However, with the unemployment rate still above the national average and the full impact of Holden's closure yet to be felt, now is not the time for complacency. South Australia's high youth unemployment is particularly concerning¹⁰. The unemployment rate for 15 to 24 year-olds ranged from 14.6% to 18.7% in 2017, and reached as high as 20.1% in the northern suburbs – one in five persons. Urgent measures are required to reverse a serious decline in the number of apprentices and prevent a looming skills shortage. Stimulating the flat housing sector is also a top priority.

Governments have responsibility for creating the right macro environment in which businesses can grow and prosper, and with it create jobs for us and our children. This includes less and more efficient regulation, and where possible, self-regulation. It also includes having lower business taxes. As one of South Australia's leading industry associations, Master Builders SA is committed to identifying barriers to employment and economic growth, outlining solutions and working with key stakeholders to achieve policy objectives. This election platform will deliver a stronger, more confident South Australia. It focuses on three key areas:

- **A place to invest in business and jobs:** building South Australia's capacity to support existing industries and businesses;
- **A place to create new businesses and jobs:** building South Australia's ability to create new industries and businesses;
- **A place for future South Australians:** creating reasons to stay and live. In particular, it is essential that South Australia regains its reputation for housing affordability.

The State Election will be judged on the ability of politicians to deliver on these measures.

IAN MARKOS
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

3 A PLACE TO INVEST IN BUSINESSES AND JOBS

Over the past quarter of a century, South Australia has lost a considerable share of the Australian economy. Since 1990, Australia's average economic growth rate was 3.1% p.a., according to data provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics¹¹. However, South Australia's economy grew at just 2.2% p.a. Out of all states and territories, only Tasmania (1.9%) recorded a slower average increase in Gross State Product. Queensland has grown at 4.0% p.a., whilst Western Australia (4.7% p.a.) has grown at more than double South Australia's annual rate. The gap is also widening. Over the past five years, South Australia's growth rate has been about half the growth rate of the national economy.

Three key factors that will help address this imbalance are population growth, a skilled workforce and the 'right' macro environment for businesses to prosper and employ more people. South Australia needs to create the jobs needed to attract and keep workers. The South Australian building and construction industry directly employs more than 65,000 people with five times that amount estimated to indirectly rely on the sector¹². However, changes within the sector are creating an environment that some analysts believe will result in a 20 per cent fall in South Australian jobs within the next decade. For example, a report by BIS Oxford Economics released late last year forecasts a 14 per cent drop in the value of construction work and the loss of 10,000 construction jobs by 2020¹³.

South Australia must seize the opportunity to change the narrative. This means business, governments, academia and the community working together to drive the state's future. This means not dwelling on the past, but rather looking forward with optimism and innovation. This means encouraging entrepreneurship, high levels of affordability and a great lifestyle.

The next State Government must focus on jobs and the cost of living and doing business as top priorities. Business investment is driven by confidence and an environment that welcomes investment. For example, business needs the lowest costs in the country and sustainable productive infrastructure. In recent years, South Australia regularly recorded the second-lowest level of business confidence of all states and territories. This was due to factors such as the closure of auto manufacturing, a fall in mining exploration and investment, and softer population figures when compared with national trends. However, during the second half of 2017 there have been signs confidence is picking up, particularly in the commercial sector. Increased confidence has flowed from encouraging data. For example, ABS state accounts figures published in November showed SA's gross state product growing by 2.2 per cent in the previous financial year, the highest of any state in per capita terms. The following measures will ensure this positive trend gathers momentum.

3.1 Economic management

Paying down state debt and responsible budget management must be important priorities for the next South Australian Government. That means delivering sustainable budgets. Although it was pleasing that surpluses were delivered for 2015-16 and 2016-17, Master Builders SA notes that this was possible largely because of the sale of the Motor Accident Commission.

Reduced public expenditure, as opposed to increased taxation, is the long-term solution. It is also vital that the next government fights very hard against any proposed changes to the GST that cut money for South Australia.

Master Builders SA believes that supporting the following policy principles will improve the economy and enable the industry to focus on what it does best – building the homes, hospitals, schools, offices, ports, shopping centres and other infrastructure that make South Australian communities more liveable:

- Reducing or eliminating business taxes (payroll tax, land tax etc)
- Investing in more houses, offices, sporting facilities and vital community infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, roads, rail and ports
- Incentivising start-up businesses by eliminating all but essential regulation (eg WHS) and provide tax breaks
- Releasing more land
- Incentivising small business to embrace and utilise digital technology
- A WHS system that rejects red tape and ideology
- Reducing regulation (red and green tape) in general, such as the requirement new dwellings have an additional water supply to supplement mains water
- Deregulating the labour market to encourage employment
- Reducing the size of government bureaucracy and improving its efficiency, particularly in the areas of health and education
- Subsidising training (particularly for small business) that will result in employment
- Focusing less on ideology in the education system and more on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects

Master Builders SA recommends a return and ongoing commitment to the issues raised as part of the State Government's State Tax Review¹⁴. Many areas remain untouched yet provide real potential for a healthier economy moving forward, much in the same way that national economic reform of the 1980s presaged significant economic benefits for all Australians. Reform and an ongoing commitment to reform would provide a clear signal to South Australian and external businesses: invest in the State that is investing in a contemporary business environment.

3.2 Power prices and reliability

In early 2017, concerns about South Australia's power security were cited as the cause of a 30-year low in consumer confidence¹⁵. The link between power security and business viability¹⁶ and the state's reputation has also been well-aired¹⁷.

Renewable energy solutions and innovation are generating continued discussion and putting South Australia on the international stage. However, Master Builders SA believes the most important thing is that South Australia has cheap, reliable power.

Whilst Master Builders SA acknowledges the enormous amount of time and effort that has been put into policies on combined purchasing power, investment in gas-fired power and battery technology in renewable energy, there remain concerns as to whether the cost of this mix will increase energy prices for businesses and consumers.

The construction industry is a very high user of power, and South Australia's electricity costs are arguably the highest in the world¹⁸. Master Builders SA believes we should use whatever means available to provide the cheapest possible power for South Australia. We need the cheapest possible power because every business pays for energy and every time they do it is a cost for their business, it means they can employ less people and invest less. That is not how the economy will grow. All options should be on the table, even nuclear. We commend the Labor Government for having the courage to raise the idea of a nuclear storage referendum and strongly support this proposal. The Nuclear Fuel Cycle Royal Commission found that South Australia could benefit from projected revenue of \$257 billion. If the government invested this money into a State Wealth Fund, this could accumulate to \$445 billion - \$260,000 for every South Australian¹⁹. All state government taxes could be abolished.

3.3 Towards a more efficient and productive South Australia

Master Builders SA recommends the Economic Development Board be repurposed and refocused to create a new statutory body, "Productivity and Infrastructure South Australia".

This body should have a similarly wide ambit to investigate economic blockages that might be holding back the State, and to provide the State Government with an independent review of the State's infrastructure needs.

This body would provide valuable information for reviews to be undertaken by the newly-established Planning Commission. In addition, it could undertake long-term investigations of significance to the productivity of South Australian industry, including the identification of costs of South Australian housing and the long-term cost of focusing on tender price at the expense of ignoring the impact of variations and contract disputes on long-term taxpayer value.

It should be apolitical and have close connections with industry and Infrastructure Australia to allow a true focus on productivity and future business growth, which would therefore lead to growth in state taxation revenues. Its independent nature would also provide the State Government with political distance from issues it might not otherwise raise – but might be needed for the betterment of the State. Master Builders SA is willing to work with the next Government to help establish this body.

3.4 Sensible investment in productive infrastructure backed by consultation and partnerships with the private sector

Strong infrastructure investment is vital for South Australian jobs and the economy. Building Better Schools, Adelaide Oval and the River Bank precinct are excellent examples. It was terrific to see infrastructure made a focus of last year's State Budget, and the announcement in January 2018 that works on the Gawler Rail Electrification Project would commence in the following weeks.

There also needs to be a strong commitment to consultation and effective investment in the maintenance of existing productive infrastructure, such as the Riverbank precinct, hospitals, courts and other public buildings.

The regions are vital for the success of the South Australian economy. Investing in productive infrastructure such as the multi-billion dollar deep-sea port development at Cape Hardy unlocks economic opportunities, but people are just as important as materials and products. For example, the Fleurieu Peninsula is a hugely popular area for tourism. Extending a train line would increase access in both directions, creating a mass of opportunities. There is existing infrastructure in place on the Cockle Train line that starts in the Hills and ends at Victor Harbor. This could be extended past Victor Harbor and connected to the Seaford Line, which would take people all the way in to central Adelaide. Benefits to the Fleurieu would be endless, and there would also be more people spending money in the city.

3.5 A focus on a WHS system that rejects red tape and ideology

Safe and productive workplaces are essential elements of the building and construction industry. The building and construction industry is one of the most intensely regulated industries in South Australia with legislation, regulation and codes of practice imposed at all three levels of Government. Master Builders SA believes the focus should be on practical workplace safety outcomes based on a safety-orientated workplace culture and individual responsibility, rather than paper-based regulatory compliance. All building industry participants have rights and obligations that are crucial to ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of each other and those over whom they have control. These elements are central to our goal of improving industry safety outcomes and driving best practice practices in an ever-evolving sector of the economy.

Master Builders SA has been a strong supporter of WHS reforms that positioned SafeWork SA as an industry-focused educator with the powers to enforce the law. However, the strength of the state-based safety regulator is being diluted by lack of focus on enforcing the principles of hazard management on sites.

Despite an unsuccessful push last year, Industrial Manslaughter laws are once again being proposed²⁰. Employers face up to 20 years in jail and companies fines of up to \$10 million. Master Builders SA believes workplace health and safety is crucial for any employer. However, this proposal is unnecessary because 2012 amendments to the *Work Health and Safety Act* addressed the issue of workplace deaths and substantially increased penalties. The solution is to focus on preventing incidents in the first place. The presence of inspectors on site operating in a coordinated approach will have a far greater impact than just increasing penalties that apply after an incident has occurred.

3.6 Reduce the size of the public service

An area that requires immediate reduced spending is the public sector, which continues to stifle investment by being an unacceptable handbrake on the private sector. Since the Global Financial Crisis in 2008, the private sector has gone through a lot of pain²¹, whilst the public sector has largely been quarantined from the challenging economic environment, creating a “protected species” class of worker that is out of touch with the “real world”²². For example, between November 2014 and November 2015, public sector jobs increased by 13.8 per cent compared to 1.8 per cent nationally. At the same time, private sector jobs increased by 3.2 per cent in Australia, but fell by 0.5 per cent – 4000 jobs – in South Australia²³.

Master Builders SA is not anti-public sector. However, our members and our own organisation have had to make some extremely tough decisions in recent years and we believe there is no reason why the public sector should be immune. The areas that need to be reduced are in the bureaucratic processes that typify the public sector.

South Australia has the highest rate of public servants per capita in the nation. The Government now has the “option” to make workers forcibly redundant 12 months after they were deemed surplus to requirements. In reality, many public servants have jobs for life. Master Builders SA believes the next Government's policy should focus more strongly on making it easier to force underperforming people out of the public service. The Government must also have the will to follow through on this policy. There continues to be widespread criticism of the productivity and customer service levels of public servants²⁴. Master Builders SA believes that in many instances taxpayers' money would be better spent on South Australian businesses.

According to Budget papers, employee expenses (payroll and related costs) for 2017/18 will be a staggering \$8.3 billion. Tens of millions of dollars in redundancy payments have been made, yet the actual number of public servants has not been reduced. The general government sector increased from 95,360 to 99,385 from 2010 to 2016²⁵.

In addition, the average salary for public servants of \$80,148 is well above the state average. There were an astounding 1300 Executives in the SA Public Sector as at June 2017²⁶.

As at 30 June 2016, public sector employees comprised 15.7% of all full-time employment in South Australia. If South Australia was in line with the national average of 12.4%, the State Government would save about \$1.2 billion per annum. This represents an opportunity to reduce taxes on businesses. For example, payroll tax, the infamous "tax on jobs" that is forecast to collect \$1.16 billion this year could be abolished. Alternatively, that money could be redirected to infrastructure spending.

If an employee resigns, retires or is terminated, there should be an independent analysis of whether that person needs to be replaced. This would help to gradually reduce the size of the public sector. The next Government should also undertake a comprehensive review of employment in all departments to ensure only positions that are necessary are retained.

Master Builders SA also believes the number of Ministers and ministerial staff should be reduced to put South Australia in line with other states. Again, if a ministerial staffer resigns, retires or is terminated, there should be an independent analysis of whether that person needs to be replaced. If a Minister resigns or retires, rather than appointing a new Minister, the portfolios could be taken up by an existing Minister. There does not need to be more than 12 Ministers in a state the size of South Australia.

Whilst Master Builders SA accepts that there is a place for government advertising, this is an area where millions of dollars in savings could easily be achieved.

3.7 Merging SafeWork SA and ReturnToWorkSA

There is a compelling argument for the merger of these institutions to offer South Australians an expert safety regulator that is able to advise on workplace safety to industry, government and the public.

Both organisations are closely aligned from the perspective of their underlying purpose. Both are seeking to minimise workplace incidents and improve return to work outcomes. There is a strong educational component to the functions of both organisations. Both share a duty to those impacted by workplace incidents to ensure a swift recovery and a full and prompt investigation into the incident. This is best supported by a subsequent education campaign to ensure that the mistakes uncovered in each investigation are fully communicated to both employers and workers in a consistent fashion to minimise a repeat of the underlying incident. This alone serves as a compelling argument for merger.

Although there are some contrasting functions between the organisations, the potential synergy is relatively clear. Data can be shared on return to work outcomes – and tailored to current employers with the benefit of practical advice. This body of data is also likely to assist inspectors as both investigators and educators, able to communicate specific risks and outcomes to employers who are more likely to respect officers for their knowledge and capacity to improve safety outcomes before they become incidents.

There also exists a compelling argument for such a merger from a financial perspective. The size of these entities with an aligned purpose provides a clear opportunity for merger to facilitate shared administration and clearer sharing of information. Combining the two bodies is likely to result in Budget savings, allowing for the tailoring of employer premiums to industry results – but also reflecting their willingness to cooperate with a proactive and consultative inspectorate. This policy has been successful in Victoria and New South Wales.

3.8 Improved relationship between governments

Earlier last year, state-based surveys were showing declining levels of business confidence with the construction industry among the most pessimistic about improvements to business performance over the next 12 months²⁷.

However, since then a “record infrastructure spend” of \$2.2 billion announced in the State Budget²⁸ and a \$690 million dollar commitment to refurbishing 91 schools across the state (publicly supported by the Opposition) were announced²⁹, giving the industry reason for optimism.

The total infrastructure spend announced in the Budget - \$9.5 billion over four years - is expected to support 5700 jobs on average per year³⁰. Industry welcomed the promised spending on social and productive infrastructure, with the community benefiting from the much-needed investment in new hospitals, schools, and courts, and businesses excited about the benefits of the extension of the North-South corridor³¹.

However, the big ticket items of the Budget, the \$415 million Regency Road-Pym Street extension and the electrification of the Gawler line, were dependent on Commonwealth funding. We saw both tiers disagree over whether projects are shovel-ready, and until the shovels dig into soil, the rubber doesn't hit the road. Master Builders SA urges politicians of all sides to put the interests of South Australians before politics and work collaboratively to get key projects up and running as soon as possible.

4 A PLACE TO CREATE NEW BUSINESSES AND JOBS

Industry needs a supportive environment to take risks to support future growth. Master Builders SA believes new businesses can be created by South Australian business owners if given the right impetus and environment. These businesses are likely to be more loyal to the State and also more likely to look for reasons to stay, rather than reasons to leave.

4.1 Advanced Construction 5 x 5 x 5

The rise of new technology is fast affecting the building and construction industry. Modularisation has moved beyond its “portable shed” days and prefabricated technologies are taking manufacturing skills to building. Other materials technologies are still in their infancy but are likely to have a great impact in coming decades.

This shift will have a marked impact on South Australia's building and construction sector unless we put the right policies in place now.

Victoria's industry and Government have developed a pathway that embraces this change, describing it as "an important enabler in the Victorian economy and a significant sector in its own right" that is expected to take a 10 per cent share of a \$150 billion national market by 2025 and create 20,000 new jobs³².

South Australia risks losing thousands of jobs over that period. Businesses will look to Victorian products, which have the advantage of Eastern Coast critical mass to present cost-savings. Meanwhile, the creation of integrated electronic models of buildings that allow the design, programming and maintenance of building structures among specialist teams ("Building Information Modelling" or BIM) is still nascent in South Australia while it attracts research funding and practical applications in other states³³.

Yet South Australia can help local businesses create new opportunities. Master Builders SA proposes a "5x5x5" plan, where five proposals are identified over the next five years, with each to be eligible to receive \$5 million in State Government seed funding. This will lower the cost of entry and show a commitment to the jobs to be created. The jobs themselves will be high-end manufacturing jobs.

Over the long-term Master Builders SA envisages that the high-end design work undertaken by these ventures will rival the defence industry, creating a natural competitive tension for STEM-focused students. Additionally, those students that move into the sector will likely look for new opportunities in time. Many will look to other industries, or will create their own ventures – a new wave of industry.

Master Builders SA is confident this will provide a positive environment for transforming today's building and construction sector into tomorrow's advanced construction sector. It will provide a way of creating new businesses that look to the State's brightest students – and a way of creating new wealth without reliance on interstate income.

It is recommended the next State Government create the new portfolio of Advanced Construction (taken up by an existing Minister) to champion this initiative – and to consolidate the industry's connection to Government.

4.2 Continuing investment in planning reform

The State Government's suite of planning reforms is supported by Master Builders SA for its commitment to sparking economic investment. The next State Government must continue this positive direction. Investments such as that made in the e-Planning system must be continued if it is to deliver the best outcome for industry, its clients and the State.

5 A PLACE FOR FUTURE SOUTH AUSTRALIANS

South Australia must be bold and position itself globally as a great place to do business, delivering the jobs, prosperity and lifestyle within a global economy of the future.

5.1 Why population growth matters

South Australia has long been regarded as a great place to live and work, reinforced by claims of low cost of living³⁴, housing affordability³⁵ and a growing city vibrancy³⁶. However, these factors are quickly

being eroded, with the result that South Australia can no longer rely upon being “a great place to bring up a family” as a way of retaining a strong population base.

Current trends are unsustainable. Sluggish population growth is a barrier to increased spending, employment and economic growth, and recently cut our level of political representation in the Federal Parliament³⁷. With the reduction from 11 to 10, South Australia will have the lowest number of seats in the House of Representatives since 1954. These trends risk creating a decline in South Australia's national influence and living standards.

South Australia's net migration figures tell a deeply alarming story. In 2016, the state suffered a net loss of almost 6000 people³⁸. Often these people are our best and brightest, and the most likely to invest in South Australia and buy a home. South Australia has the highest median age in mainland Australia, and our ageing population will put increased strain on the budget, especially in health³⁹. A decline in our economy and lifestyle compared to other states is inevitable unless we give South Australians reasons to stay, and others to come.

Jobs growth in South Australia continues to lag well behind the national average. Population growth will help address this imbalance because it increases demand, allowing our State to attract and retain professionals willing to invest in their careers and businesses. The end result will be a stronger and healthier economy with growing export opportunities for a new generation of young entrepreneurs proud to call South Australia home. Therefore, Master Builders SA recommends South Australia seek special regional immigration status to obtain the advantages relating to boosting population growth. Other policies detailed in this submission such as stamp duty relief and reduced taxation will also assist with this objective.

The State Government has previously committed to working toward South Australia having a population of two million people by 2027. This should remain the target, but requires being bold. Master Builders SA's housing affordability policies will slow the drain of South Australians moving interstate and assist in reaching this objective.

5.2 HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

For too many younger Australians, home ownership has become an unattainable dream. A key policy objective for the next State Government must be ensuring affordability for South Australians across a diverse range of housing options.

Building homes drives the state economy, creates jobs, stimulates other industries and helps create better communities. Affordable housing also gives South Australians reasons to stay, and others a reason to come.

Housing affordability is a key factor in attracting people to South Australia and keeping them here. However, South Australia is rapidly losing its competitive advantage of affordable housing, and is now ranked equal third in terms of the cost of housing compared to average incomes. This does not include the burden of high utility costs in South Australia (electricity, water and so on). We must regain our reputation for affordability – or at the absolute minimum commit to avoiding slipping further down the ranks.

A number of factors have led to a worsening of housing affordability. These include inefficient land release strategies, excessive development levies, taxes and charges, and excessive planning and building requirements. It is estimated that these factors drive up house prices by about 40 per cent. We need to remove impediments to the building of more new housing options if we are to enjoy the benefits of a strong building industry and a strong economy.

For example, South Australian building rules require that new dwellings and some extensions or alterations have an additional water supply to supplement mains water. The most common way to meet this requirement is to install plumbed minimum-sized rainwater tanks. The additional water supply must be installed before a house or extension is occupied. When Queensland abolished this requirement in 2013, it was estimated the average home owner saved \$7,000. Master Builder SA recommends a review of all taxes and charges related to land and property development.

Increasing demand

There are levers the next Government can pull to increase demand. A range of State-based policies is required that promotes confidence in the housing industry and supports the aspirations of young South Australians' dream of home ownership.

New entrants into the housing market need to be subsidised to ensure there is intergenerational equity for young people to achieve home ownership.

Master Builders SA has welcomed the Weatherill Government's efforts at taxation reforms aimed at creating investment opportunities and triggering new economic activity. A commitment to lowering stamp duty for non-residential property transactions and the opening of stamp duty concessions for off-the-plan projects has contributed to a sustained high level of inner-city development applications. Following this year's State Budget purchasers who entered into an eligible off-the-plan apartment contract between 22 June 2017 and 30 September 2017 may have been eligible to receive a \$10,000 pre-construction grant. The off-the-plan apartment concession, which has been in place in various forms for a number of years now, provides a partial stamp duty concession on a transfer of a new apartment or substantially refurbished apartment until 30 June 2018. Master Builders was pleased the Government took up our suggestion last year to see the concession extended beyond inner city limits to anywhere in South Australia⁴⁰.

However, consumers want choice and more needs to be done for South Australians looking for a house or a unit with a backyard. Stamp duty remains a key area for reform. First homebuyers must borrow to pay for stamp duty, meaning their \$18,000 tax on a media home becomes a \$60,000 noose with interest over the duration of their mortgage.

Master Builders SA recommends the introduction of a stamp duty exemption for first homebuyers on new builds up to the value of the median Adelaide house price, which is \$450,000 according to the 2017 September Quarter Valuer-General Report⁴¹.

Similar incentives currently available in New South Wales and Victoria have proven to be a terrific stimulus for their housing markets. For example, since July, Victorian first homebuyers have been given a leg-up through the abolition of stamp duty on properties up to \$600,000 and stamp duty reductions on properties less than \$750,000. According to data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the trend estimate for total number of dwelling units approved in South Australia rose just 0.1% in November compared to 5.6% in Victoria.

South Australia must match this relief to encourage first homebuyers to remain and invest in the State. Master Builders SA rejects the argument that housing prices will rise given the lack of East Coast heat in the property market and the likely distinct markets attracting first homebuyers and investors.

This position is supported by other bodies⁴². It is an essential policy for the future of our State.

5.3 Extension of Pre-Construction Grant

ABS stats show there was a solid spike in the value of work commenced for apartments and units during 2017, from \$113.3 million during the March 2017 Quarter to \$350.3 million during the June 2017 Quarter. Even though there was a decrease to \$284.9 million during the September 2017 Quarter, this still represents a significant increase from earlier in the year.⁴³

The challenge now is to maintain this heightened level of activity. Master Builders SA recommends that the \$10,000 Pre-Construction Grant for purchasers who entered into an eligible off-the-plan apartment contract between 22 June and 30 September is brought back. The full benefits will become clearer over the coming months, but our members reported a significant uptick of buyer interest during the eligibility period.

5.4 First Home Owner Grant boost for the regions

Currently, a First Home Owner Grant of up to \$15,000 applies to the purchase of construction of a new residential property, including a house, flat, unit, townhouse or apartment that meets local planning standards.

Master Builders SA recommends that the existing First Home Owner Grant be increased to \$20,000 in regional South Australia. The eligible transaction can be a contract for the purchase of a new residential premises or a comprehensive home building contract, and would be available until 30 June 2021. This policy is based on the very successful model for regional Victoria⁴⁴.

Master Builders SA believes these policies will help first homebuyers and stimulate the generally flat housing sector. The value of work commenced for new houses was \$472.5 million for the September 2017 Quarter, down from \$525.6 million during the June 2017 Quarter⁴⁵.

5.5 TRAINING

A strong apprenticeship system is crucial to ensure a prosperous industry in the future. Unfortunately, the number of apprentices has seriously declined in an environment where consumers and many of our members are already grappling with a skills shortage. With South Australia's population ageing, long-term policy solutions are required that focus on quality training so the next generation of builders can meet demand in the decades ahead.

Many young people feel pressured to go to university because it is seen as more prestigious. There is a belief that university degrees give you more and better employment outcomes, but often this doesn't reflect the reality on the ground. University is a sound choice if you have a very clear idea of your career path and that path requires a degree. Otherwise, you just risk wasting time and money.

With more than 30 per cent of graduates finishing university with no immediate job prospects, young people should be encouraged to go where the work is. The building and construction industry alone directly employs more than 65,000 South Australians, 8 per cent of the workforce.

Tradies earn great money these days because demand for their services is outstripping supply. The push to go to university has created a nation-wide shortage of tradespersons. Since 2010, apprentice and trainee commencements have decreased by 1,530 (55.2 per cent). During the same period,

enrolments in VET courses related to the construction industry have decreased by 3,320 (25.2 per cent)⁴⁶. This rate of decline within South Australia easily outpaces the national average. At the same time, demand for trades has been as strong as ever. With South Australia's ageing population, skills will be in demand well into the future.

It is ridiculous that there is still a stigma attached to being a tradie. However, there are great opportunities for those that ignore this negativity. For example, a recent report found that a bricklaying apprenticeship will put a young person financially ahead of a three-year Bachelor's Degree by about \$110,000 by their third year⁴⁷.

Tradies are also less likely to suffer from underemployment. In the year to February 2017, 83 per cent of the construction industry was employed full-time, compared to 64.6 per cent of the South Australian workforce⁴⁸.

Master Builders SA has long undertaken a successful apprenticeship program that aims not only at providing participants with life-long skills, but also at connecting them with a network of passionate industry advocates looking to develop the next generation of builders.

Apprenticeships are focused on the development and transfer of practical skills into a life-long career. Feeder programs allow young people to get on site and see if a trade is for them. Once they start their apprenticeship, they are paid while they learn, and unlike university graduates, they won't finish their course with a five-figure debt. There is solid potential to be their own boss, and they won't spend years confined to an office desk.

Master Builders SA believes being a tradesperson is an excellent career choice and this needs to be promoted to young people in our schools. We seek funding for the "Master Builders SA Born to Build" program we have developed. The program would be delivered by an Education Officer who would go out to schools and communities and spruik the benefits of doing an apprenticeship. A high-quality VET Coordinator with the experience to talk to young people would be the best person for this job. This program could be tied in with the \$690 million Building Better Schools Program that was announced by the Weatherill Government in October and supported by the Opposition. Young people who were interested in the initial presentation would have the opportunity to speak to tradies, construction managers and other workers, view the building sites and witness first-hand its development.

This program does not require a huge amount of money but will provide huge "bang for the buck". We believe it can help address the plummeting number of apprentices and the worsening skills shortage whilst providing South Australia's young people with a pathway to a career that would allow them to escape generational unemployment.

Master Builders SA proposes a grant of \$200,000 for the first year of the program to give it the opportunity to demonstrate value. Provided KPIs were met in an independent review, funding could be extended.

5.6 Support for "adult apprentices"

Master Builders SA strongly welcomed last year's announcement that payments would be boosted by up to \$5,000 for businesses taking on apprentices and trainees as part of the Weatherill Government's job accelerator grants. We would like to see this \$8.1 million program extended. Another way to improve participation rates in apprenticeships and improve unemployment figures is to introduce funding for persons aged 21 and over. Most businesses cannot employ "young adult" apprentices as they cost too much, yet this demographic have vital problem solving, awareness and communication

skills that many younger apprentices lack. "Adult apprentices" are more attractive to an employer but not at the rate of pay that is required under current funding arrangements.

We see this policy as a sensible investment in South Australia's future. Our industry is pivotal to the growth of this state with infrastructure development one of the key driving factors required to reinvigorate the economy. Without a healthy apprenticeships model and uptake, our workforce is ageing and we risk not having the succession pipeline to support the growth that is needed in this state.

5.7 Support for Registered Training Organisations

In 2015, the funding model that split public subsidies equally between TAFE and the private sector was changed. This policy has resulted in the collapse of industry providers that offered training courses for a lower cost for both trainees and taxpayers. Unfortunately, this policy decision forced Master Builders SA to close its long-running and industry respected Registered Training Organisation. Master Builders SA would like to see the next State Government again commit to the doctrine of competitive neutrality and have the original funding arrangements restored for not-for-profit industry association RTOs. We would like to be in a position to re-open our RTO, but no matter what parity between TAFESA and the private provider funding would allow for greater contestability and student choice in the VET sector.

An even playing field would allow private RTOs to deliver the industry-focused education they do so well and allow TAFE to focus on its community service obligations of delivering training to disadvantaged and regional students so they can develop skills that allow them to enter into industry specific training (through private providers) to gain meaningful employment and upskill to higher paying positions.

Master Builders SA strongly believes that no other organisation can match us for training in the building and construction industry. We have industry-based trainers, currency, mentoring, understanding of the latest technology, and most importantly, through our industry connections young people that train with us have excellent employment outcomes.

6 SUMMARY OF KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

INCREASE JOBS

1. Reduce or eliminate business taxes (payroll tax, land tax etc). In the short-term, the threshold at which payroll tax kicks in could be increased from \$600,000 to \$1.5 million, with the long-term goal of abolishing it completely.
2. Funding for the Master Builders SA "Born to Build" program to increase the number of apprentices, which have more than halved since 2013
3. Extension of the support provided for apprentices and trainees as part of the Weatherill Government's job accelerator grants
4. Introduce funding for apprentices aged 21 and over
5. Re-introduce equal funding for not for profit industry association quality education
6. Continued support for and investment in planning reforms
7. Seek special regional immigration status to boost population growth

INCREASE HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

8. Introduce a stamp duty exemption for first homebuyers on new builds up to the value of the median Adelaide house price
9. Increase the existing First Home Owner Grant to \$20,000 in regional South Australia
10. Review all taxes and charges related to land and property development. For example, the requirement of an additional water supply for new dwellings and some extensions or alterations should be abolished
11. Bring back the \$10,000 Pre-Construction Grant

INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY

12. Reduce regulation (red and green tape) and promoting a WHS system that rejects red tape and ideology
13. Create the new statutory body "Productivity and Infrastructure SA"
14. The State Government undertake a cost-benefit review with regard to the impact on the private sector before creating new processes
15. Reduce the size of the public sector from 15.7% of all full-time employment so it is line with the national average of 12.4%, saving about \$1.2 billion per annum.
16. Make it easier to force underperforming people out of the public service
17. Reduce the number of Executives in the SA public sector
18. Reduce the number of ministers and ministerial staff
19. Merge SafeWork SA and ReturnToWorkSA
20. Both tiers of governments working more collaboratively in South Australia's interests
21. Reduce government advertising

INVEST IN THE FUTURE OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

22. Secure cheap and reliable power by pursuing nuclear storage
23. Fight against any proposed changes to the GST that cut money for South Australia
24. Invest in more houses, offices, sporting facilities and vital community infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, roads, rail and ports
25. Extend a train line to the Fleurieu Peninsula
26. Incentivise start-up businesses by eliminating all but essential regulation and providing tax breaks
27. Maintain existing penalties under the Work Health and Safety Act 2012 rather than introduce Industrial Manslaughter laws
28. \$25 million investment in the 5x5x5 plan for Advanced Construction

7 CONCLUSION

The recommendations within this document are intended to improve the health of South Australia's building and construction industry with minimal impact on the State Budget.

There are three clear legs to improving the prospects for the South Australian economy: supporting current businesses in their desire to grow, offering support for new industries that will offset expected job losses and create new jobs and export opportunities, and improve housing affordability.

Master Builders SA has based this submission on input from its members, leading industry figures and specialist staff, and thanks those parties for their valuable contributions.

Master Builders SA is the peak body representing the State's building and construction industry. We would appreciate every opportunity to contribute the benefit of that knowledge and experience in any ongoing industry consultation.

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