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**BE.
BENDIGO**

MEDIA RELEASE

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Be.Bendigo welcomes the announcement in tonight's Federal Budget regarding the short term 50% reduction in Fuel Excise.

"The recent significant rises in the cost of fuel have had a disproportionate impact on regional businesses and communities", according to Be.Bendigo CEO, Rob Herbert.

"As well as the direct cost of putting fuel in the tank to get to work and just going about our daily lives in regional areas, most of the finished goods we buy and business inputs are transported by road, over long distances. Consequently, the steep increases in fuel costs have had a much greater impact in regional areas, as most local people will have experienced", he continued.

"We have seen the way the local economy is already bouncing back, with the recent opening of the Elvis Exhibition at Bendigo Art Gallery providing the headlines, but with a whole range of events providing great stimulus for hospitality and the visitor economy, which helps to put more money into the hands of local businesses and people. Cutting the fuel excise – even as a short-term measure – will ensure that this recovery will continue."

While pleased that both the Government and Opposition had already announced measures to help alleviate issues with access to residential accommodation, which was a significant issue that had been identified as a constraint in Bendigo, an apparent reduction in funding of university places was a concern in addressing skills deficits and educational attainment in regional areas, according to Mr Herbert.

Mr Herbert indicated that Be.Bendigo would be further analysing the Budget announcements over coming days, and were keenly looking to the Budget response from the Federal Opposition.

"In an Election Year, it is incredibly important that the voice of Regional Business is heard and responded to", he said. "Bendigo has experienced strong population growth in recent years, and this appears to have accelerated during the Covid pandemic. We want to ensure that local businesses - and our communities - are able to maximise the economic, social and cultural benefits of this growth, while ameliorating some of the pressures that this growth can produce."

RELEASE ENDS

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