

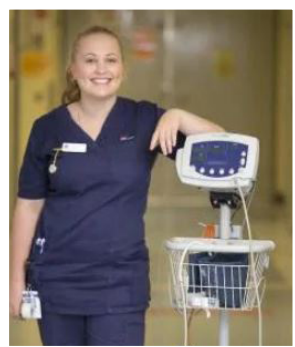
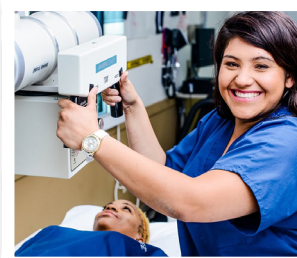
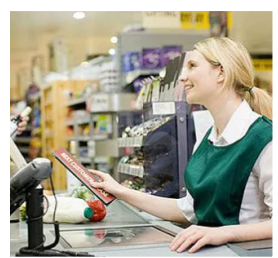
CLAYTON BARR'S State News

Winter 2020



CLAYTON BARR MP | YOUR LOCAL STATE MEMBER FOR THE ELECTORATE OF CESSNOCK

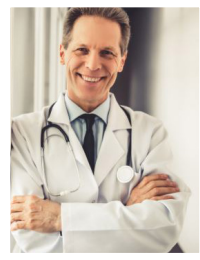
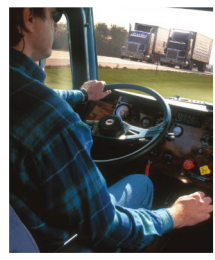
Office: 118 Vincent Street (PO Box 242), Cessnock NSW 2325 Phone: 4991 1466 Email: cessnock@parliament.nsw.gov.au
Facebook: ClaytonBarrMP Website: www.claytonbarr.com.au



THANK YOU

As restrictions ease further, I want to thank each and every person for playing your part in keeping our community COVID-19 safe.

In particular thank you to all our essential workers, teachers, health care workers, supermarket and retail workers, cleaners, correctional officers and first responders for continuing to protect our community during this time.



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COVID-19 Testing Facility in Cessnock



A COVID-19 testing facility was established in mid May after multiple representations were made to Hunter New England Health and the Minister for Health, Brad Hazzard, MP.

After the initial surge in confirmed cases in the Cessnock Local Government Area (LGA), many residents began calling for a local testing facility to be established and I am pleased to say after multiple representations and phone calls, a drive thru testing facility was established at Cessnock District Hospital.

Having access to COVID-19 testing in the Cessnock LGA is incredibly important not just to gather vitally important information but is key in avoiding a disastrous second wave.

Prior to the testing facility being established, residents in the Cessnock LGA would have to either go to a handful of local doctors or travel to Maitland, Singleton or Newcastle for testing.

When I began calling for a testing facility to be established the number of tests conducted on residents in the Cessnock LGA was severely behind that of other areas. Since the May 20 opening of the testing facility, there has been a significant increase in the number of tests conducted.

Between May 20 to June 21 2020 approximately 2,260 tests have been performed at the Cessnock Drive Thru Testing Facility with no positive cases confirmed.

Originally the facility was due to finish on Tuesday 26 May before being extended to June 13, then to June 22, and due to demand the

testing facility has been extended until further notice with a high number of people presenting for testing. At the time of writing, to book an appointment at the testing facility you need to call 4991 0436. I encourage anyone with symptoms, even mild ones, to be tested. The more tests conducted the better we are able to prevent the spread of COVID-19 within our community. The locations and opening hours of COVID-19 testing clinics are available at www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/covid-19/Pages/clinics

COVID-19 Restrictions and facts

With the easing of restrictions and the cooler weather upon us we need to not become complacent. As of the time of writing we have seen a large rise in the number of cases in Victoria, especially around community transmission which should be seen as a warning to those in NSW that we need to remain on guard for COVID-19.

It is incredibly important for all community members, workplaces and businesses to follow health advice, practicing good hygiene, social distancing and staying at home if you are sick or waiting for COVID-19 testing results.

The four square metre rule must be enforced at public spaces and businesses. The four square metre rule determines the maximum number of people allowed on the premises or attending an event. It means the premises must allow four square metres of space per person. This does not determine the distance between people. Everyone should be practicing social distancing reducing the physical contact you have with one another and staying 1.5m away from people you don't live in the same house with.

If a business or organisation does not comply with health restrictions and/or rules including the four square metre rule you can make a report to Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000 or nsw.crimestoppers.com.au

For the latest in restrictions/changes to the rules you can see my Facebook page or visit NSW Health website www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/what-you-can-and-cant-do-under-rules

For any clarification please call Service NSW 24 hour COVID-19 information line 13 77 88.



Bushfire Commission

An Independent inquiry into the recent bushfires was announced at the end of January 2020. The inquiry has been lead by former Deputy Commissioner of NSW Police, Dave Owens, APM and Independent Planning Commission Chair and former NSW Chief Scientist Professor Mary O'Kane AC. The six month inquiry was reviewing the causes of, preparation for and response to the 2019-20 bushfires.

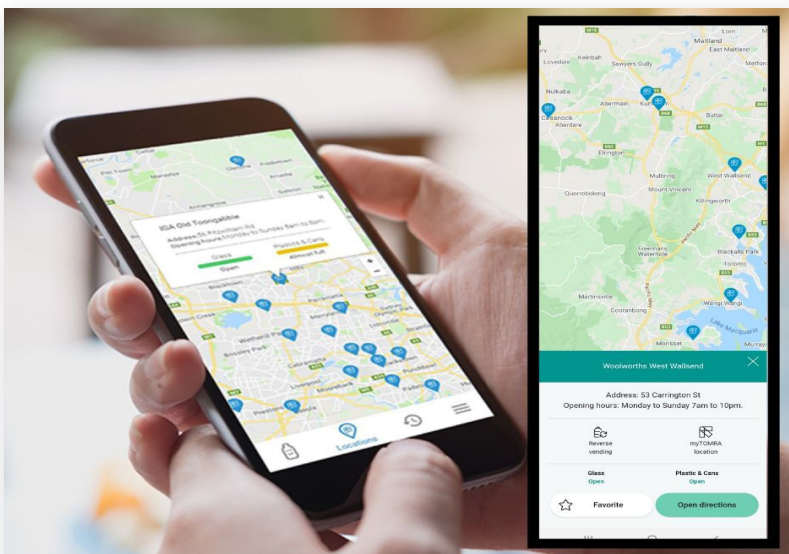
The inquiry called for people in the general public to make submissions with the more information collected the more we can learn from the inquiry.

The inquiry is vital in identifying/ensuring mistakes that were made in the lead up to and during the 2019/2020 bushfire crisis don't happen again.



Return and Earn App.

The popularity of the Return and Earn's has not wavered across the Cessnock Electorate with many residents using the reserve vending machines to recycle their glass and plastic bottles and cans.



Return and Earn's collection points have been operating during the COVID-19 Pandemic with measures implemented to make it easier to use the point. Anyone using a Return and Earn point must maintain social distancing of at least 1.5m from others and practicing good hygiene. To view whether a reverse vending machine is open you can download the myTOMRA app from the App store. You can also track your refunds, store your digital vouchers, find directions to your nearest machine as well checking the machine's capacity.

Summer Bushfires 2019/20



The 2019/2020 bushfire season was devastating for much of NSW. Normally starting in October the bushfire season started over two months early with persistent dry and warm conditions and drought affecting 95% of NSW.

Our Rural Fire Service volunteers were kept busy over the summer with fires burning in multiple areas of the Electorate including Broke, Pelaw Main, Kearsley, Greta, Wollombi, Laguna, Pokolbin, Milbrodale, North Rothbury, Kitchener, Putty, Congewai, Branxton to name a few.

The NSW Rural Fire Service reported between July 2019 to February 2020 there were 11,264 bush or grass fires in NSW which burnt 5.4 million hectares (13 million acres) and destroyed 2,439 homes.

Over 5 months the fires raged across NSW taking 33 lives, destroyed thousands of homes, shrouded our communities in smoke and devastated our wildlife.

In the Electorate of Cessnock we saw the courage of many fire-fighters and citizens working together to fight fires, protect families, houses and properties.

Fires across the Electorate included:

October 2019 - Nulkaba and small section of Cessnock Cemetery.

November 2019 - Greta, Pokolbin and North Rothbury.

Late November 2019 - The Little L and Crumps Complex.

December 2019 to February 2020 Kerry Ridge in Wollemi National Park.

December 2019 - Pelaw Main, Buchanan, Richmond Vale and Stanford Merthyr.

It is impossible to properly thank the incredibly brave men and women of the Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue NSW and all our first responders for looking after our communities. Thank you for all you have done and continue to do.

Overcrowding in our local schools

Schools across NSW are bursting at the seams as the Berejiklian Government's school enrolment cap crackdown has been a massive failure.

Recent investigations revealed 45% of schools covered by the enrolment cap were overcrowded with 10 schools subject to the cap in the Electorate of Cessnock over capacity.

The cap is the number of students that can be enrolled based on the school's permanent classrooms and typical class sizes. Schools that exceed the cap will not accept out of catchment students. The cap replaced the locally set enrolment 'ceilings'.

Five schools including Branxton Public School, Edgeworth Heights Public School, Bellbird Public School, Edgeworth Public School and Pelaw Main Public School have had increased enrolments and are over by more than 30%.

The introduction of the enrolment cap has caused anxiety for families who faced having to split up their children to go to different schools and it has not helped solve the issue of overcrowding in our public schools.

Lack of investment in our schools is a clear indication of how the Berejiklian Government views public education.

Fundamentals of education including adequate classrooms and sufficient maintenance of property are being overlooked for the Berejiklian Government's vanity projects such as the Power House Museum relocation and Sydney Light Rail. The lack of investment can be clearly seen by the amount of schools across the Electorate not just over the cap but exceedingly over capacity. We need ongoing investment in our regional schools.

DATA FROM 2020 Budget Estimates supplied from
Department of Education

School	Actual Enrolment	Enrolment Cap	Actual vs Cap %
Branxton Public School	377	231	163.2%
Edgeworth Hights Public School	406	278	146.0%
Bellbird Public School	251	185	135.7%
Edgeworth Public School	610	462	132.0%
Pelaw Main Public School	195	150	130.0%
Greta Public School	194	162	119.8%
Cessnock East Public School	249	208	119.7%
Barnsley Public School	319	301	106.0%
Mount View High School	957.5	940	101.9%
Abermain Public School	279	278	100.4%

Edgeworth Public School bus stop

There is movement at the bus stop, after several false starts the students at Edgeworth Public School will hopefully soon have the use of the much desired bus stop at the back of the school completed.

What should have been a simple solution to the safety hazard of the school bus stop located on a main road has been anything but straightforward.

It has taken more than 12 years to get the bus stop relocated away from the heavy traffic flow of Main Road Edgeworth. I have continued to work along side the community and the school to fight to make this happen.

It is increasingly gratifying to see the construction of the bus stop almost complete. The purpose-built bus bay will have a covered concrete path from the back of the school to the bus stop.



Water Restrictions

At the end of February, due to decent rainfall, water restrictions were able to be eased back from Level 2 to Level 1. However we still need to be water wise as we could be back up to Level 2 if dam levels drop down below 60% again.

Level 1 water restrictions include:

- No sprinklers are to be used
- Outdoor watering is permitted before 10am or after 4pm with a trigger nozzle hose
- All hand held hoses must have a trigger nozzle
- No hosing of hard surfaces such as concrete, paths and driveways
- All vehicles should be washed with a bucket, trigger nozzle hose or pressure cleaner.



Porkbarrelling affects the Cessnock Electorate

The Cessnock Electorate came into focus as part of an ABC News story in May with the NSW Deputy Premier, John Barilaro and the then Minister for the Arts, Don Harwin blatantly ignoring expert recommendations and pork-barrelled \$44 million in cultural arts funding into Coalition Electorates. Prior to last years state election Barilaro and Harwin announced the funding as part of regional infrastructure grants to arts and cultural organisations.



This is pork barrelling at its absolute political worst. A total of 56 projects were funded in 23 Electorates of which 20 were held by the Nationals/Liberals.

Of the \$47 million in funding distributed by John Barilaro and Don Harwin: \$31 million to National seats, \$12 million to Liberal seats, \$2.96 million to minor parties (Shooters, Fishers and Farmers and the Green's) and only \$4,000 to Labor seats.

While pork barrelling is not something new to politics this blatant disregard for the grant process is beyond compare. It is quite appalling that organisations and people put time and effort into putting applications together for Ministers to simply ignore the rules that had been set out.

The application process is meant to be simple.

Eligible organisations would lodge an application including supporting documentation which is then reviewed by a 6 person expert panel. The panel then ranked them in order of funding preference.

The panel was made up of 4 independent experts from the arts and cultural fields, 1 executive from State Government agency Create NSW and one representative from the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

After all applications were accessed the Cessnock Performing Art Centre's (CPAC) application was ranked in the top 13 out of over 150 applications.

The Cessnock City Council had asked for a modest grant of \$118,000 to upgrade the CPAC lighting to LED. This change in lighting would have seen a significant reduction in electricity used by the centre and saved ratepayers money.

However the Cessnock Performing Arts Centre received zero funding as the Deputy Premier and then Minister for Arts decided to ignore the expert opinions in favour of pork barrelling. Things were so badly handled that 13 projects that did not even meet the eligibility criteria were funded.

Public sector workers left out in the cold

The Berejiklian Government have wasted a considerable amount of time and resources on plans to implement a wage freeze for public sector workers at a time of crisis. Our hard working public sector employees include nurses, teachers, hospital cleaners, correctional staff, police officers, aged and disability carers, water workers, firefighters and many more. These workers are the very same people that have taken on extra duties to keep our communities safe from COVID-19 and continuing to function.

The NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian and Treasurer Dominic Perrottet have repeatedly claimed that a wage freeze to more than 400,000 public sector workers will stimulate the economy despite there being no evidence to support this.

An independent report has been released from The Australia Institute that states cutting public sector wages will actually reduce the jobs and remove tens of millions of dollars from regional areas.

This cruel and disrespectful act by the Berejiklian Government shows how out of touch with society they really are. Public sector workers are those who have sacrificed and gone above and beyond for our community during this pandemic. They should be praised, not given a pay cut.

Not only will a pay cut impact on our public sector workers and their families it will also have a broader impact on the community as those local workers are the ones who spend money in local businesses and services. I am happy to support any local group of public service workers, their families and supporters to protest against this wage freeze.



Funding in the Electorate

As a result of funding released by the National/Liberal Government several shovel ready projects across the Electorate were granted funding for work to start in early May 2020.

The Government spending spree is a result of job losses and the impact of COVID-19 on the NSW economy. The plan is to inject money into communities by building infrastructure.

Some of these projects have been on the table for a number of years, so to finally get the funding is a good thing. Allowing them to go ahead will make positive long-term changes to facilities and equipment that will be enjoyed for decades to come.

The Richmond Vale Rail Trail is set to receive \$75,000 for the engagement of a specialist consultant to move the project forward.

Cessnock Airport also received \$6.6 million under the Growing Local Economies Fund for upgrades. This project is expected to bring much needed funds into the community.

It is hoped that by approving these regional projects it will help to employ local trades people and encourage the purchase of materials and equipment from our local small businesses.

Finalist Young Woman of the Year Awards



Heddon Greta's Julia Weber was a finalist in the NSW Young Woman of the Year.

An extraordinary young woman, Julia was nominated for Young Woman of the Year for her achievement in helping to improve the financial literacy of young people from all backgrounds.

While studying full time Julia teaches financial literacy to high school and university students. Her quest to improve

financial literacy has led to her writing a financial literacy course that she has delivered to high schools.

Julia is also working on an app to enable young people to find funding for small business ideas.

She is a genuine trailblazer whose story is an inspiration to us all.

The NSW Women of the Year Awards is an annual awards ceremony which will celebrate its tenth year in 2021. The Awards recognise and celebrate the outstanding contribution made by women across NSW to industry, communities and society.

For information on the awards you can visit women.nsw.gov.au

Local Woman of the Year



Local Woman Sonia Sharp was named the Cessnock Electorate's Woman of the Year at the NSW Women of the Year Awards in March.

Sonia was recognised for her outstanding dedication to ensuring Aboriginal people have a voice at all levels in the community.

Sonia helps local schools and families with school policies and works as a conduit between schools, parents, the community and organisations to best help children to achieve their educational goals.

Since 2007, Sonia has been the President of The Greater Cessnock Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) and has worked with the group to promote an understanding of Aboriginal culture and education programs.

After recognising the lack of an Aboriginal voice within primary schools, Sonia set about establishing the Aboriginal Education Teams (AETs) in our schools, a first for NSW. This program has been picked up across the state with Junior AECGs now running in primary schools and high schools.

Sonia also helped establish the 'Deadly Cooking for Kids Program' in conjunction with Hunter New England Health, Cessnock Walks and Kawuma Peaceful Walk that was held to raise awareness of the impact of domestic and family violence.

It is hard working heroes in our community that serve as an inspiration to everyone in our local communities, heartfelt congratulations Sonia.

Community Building Partnership Program recipients 2019



In March the successful 2019 Community Building Partnership (CBP) recipients were announced with 21 projects to be funded across the Cessnock Electorate. First introduced by the Labor Government in 2009, the program has provided funding to thousands of community groups, sporting clubs and councils across NSW.

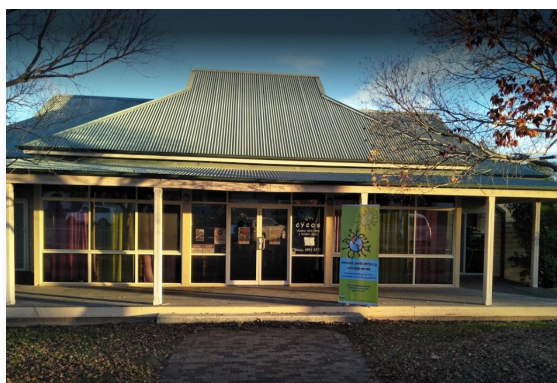
Earlier this year I was pleased to inspect the fabulous kitchen upgrade at the Kurri Kurri Girls Guides Hall. The girl guides were successful in gaining \$8,262 under the program to fund a renovation of their kitchen including new cupboard storage, backsplash and flooring.

SUCCESSFUL RECIPIENTS:

- **Kurri Kurri Scout Group** received **\$4,000** for a fire pit area.
- **Cessnock City Council** received **\$10,000** for Drain Oval Facility upgrade.
- **Edgeworth Community Pre School** received **\$20,000** for an outdoor shade sail.
- **Kearsley Community Sporting Association Inc.** received **\$23,650** for flood lighting of Jeffrey Park Kearsley.
- **Country Women's Association Cessnock Branch** received **\$6,500** for refurbishments that will complete building upgrade.
- **Branxton Greta Little Athletics** received **\$9,600** for a new mower.
- **Compass Housing Services Co Ltd** received **\$30,000** for Weston Community Hub
- **St Luke's Millfield** received **\$10,780** for fencing project.
- **Branxton Public School P&C Association** received **\$22,000** for Branxton goes digital.
- **Cessnock Multi-purpose Children's Centre Ltd** received **\$20,000** for meeting Cessnock's growing needs for out of school hours care.
- **Sugarvalley Neighbourhood Advancement Group Inc** received **\$16,000** for their bathroom amenities refurbishment.
- **Holmesville Community Hall (LMCC)** received **\$5,000** for supply and installation of air conditioning
- **Cessnock Minor Rugby League** received **\$20,000** for Mt View Park Lighting (Stage 2).
- **Weston Masonic Centre** received **\$3,600** for refurbishment of electrical systems.
- **Mulbring Public School P&C** received **\$18,890** for a covered walkway
- **Weston Workers Bears Football Club** received **\$30,000** to upgrade their regional sporting facility scoreboard/noticeboard.
- **Branxton Tennis Club Inc.** received **\$18,120** for upgrade of Tennis court lighting to LED.
- **West Wallsend Amateur Soccer Club Inc.** received **\$8,482** for high boundary fence.
- **PCYC Cessnock** received **\$9,281** for meeting room and hall repairs.
- **Abermain-Weston Hawks Rugby League Inc.** received **\$10,687** for Howe Park scoreboard, PA system and fencing.
- **Cessnock City Hornets Football Club Inc.** received **\$3,410** for junior football training facilities expansion.

Stronger Country Communities Fund

The Cessnock Electorate received funding in May from the Stronger Country Communities Fund. The fund was established to deliver local projects to regional communities with the aim of the projects to improve the lives of people who live in regional areas.



Under the Stronger Country Communities Fund several projects have been funded which will benefit the Cessnock Electorate including Lake Macquarie Performing Arts Centre who secured \$269,374; Live Life Active \$95,625; Cessnock Youth Centre and Outreach Service (CYCOS) \$120,226; Cessnock Performing Arts Centre \$75,100; Branxton Greta Little Athletics \$98,000; Cessnock PCYC \$217,000; and Cessnock Top Blokes Foundation \$215,000.

It is fantastic to see funding allocated for community groups, organisations and not-for-profits. As your local MP I am continually advocating for our community and it is fantastic when funding is received.

\$43,946 in local sport funding

13 local sporting groups from across the Electorate received funding as part of the 2019-20 Local Sport Grant Program. The program aims to increase regular and ongoing participation opportunities in sport and active recreation in NSW. This funding will help our local sporting groups and organisations to upgrade existing equipment and facilities, an opportunity to build on their coaching programs, purchase new uniforms and more with the aim to encourage participation in sport.

SUCCESSFUL RECIPIENTS:

- **Greta Branxton Football** secured **\$2,000** for the provision of training courses for female coaches and players.
- **Cessnock District Amateur Basketball Club Ltd** secured **\$2,000** for the provision of accreditation courses for referees, coaches, game officials and club administrators.
- **Hotel Cessnock Cricket Club** secured **\$5,000** for the purchase of ground maintenance equipment for Drain Oval.
- **Branxton Greta Amateur Swimming Club** secured **\$5,000** for subsidised registration and swimming costumes for all members.
- **Bellbird Junior Football Club** secured **\$5,000** for the purchase of Training and playing equipment.
- **Kearsley Community Sporting Association Inc.** secured **\$2,800** for the purchase of uniforms for the female rugby league team.
- **Kurri Kurri Minor Rugby League Inc.** secured **\$500** for the purchase of a first aid kit and coaching courses for volunteers.
- **Weston Workers Bears Football Club** secured **\$5,000** for the purchase of portable goals.
- **Kurri Kurri Little Athletics** secured **\$5,000** for the purchase of athletics equipment.
- **Cardiff Australia Football Club** secured **\$2,395** for the purchase of AFL goal posts pads for Pasterfield Sports Complex in Cameron Park.
- **Abermain Weston Hawks RLFC** secured **\$3,765** for the purchase of uniforms for the women's team.
- **Hunter District Cycling Club Inc.** secured **\$1,308** for the purchase of two blower vacs for pre race track clearing.
- **Branxton Golf Club Co-op** secured **\$4,178** for the installation of concrete access ramps and graduated steps with fabricated steel handrails to the elevated 7th and 16th tees.

Access into Cessnock Correctional Centre

Over the past 4 years since the expansion of the Cessnock Correctional Centre I have worked with multiple groups, including Department of Justice Infrastructure, the community, Cessnock City Council and two Ministers for Corrections to find a new entry/exit to the centre.

In 2016 the NSW Government changed planning rules to allow massive gaol expansions to be undertaken on existing sites without the need for Council approval or any need to make a contribution to the local community to minimise the impact. Since that time, the Government have not been required to do anything about a new entry/exit, so any offer that the Government made was as a gesture of goodwill.

A range of possible options were considered. After many conversations it became clear the best option remaining was the concept of a diagonal road through the back of NSW Health land, to join Occident Street and turn onto Kerlew Street and down to Wine Country Drive.

The Council was advised on multiple occasions of the finality of this offer from Corrections and that if a decision was not made all goodwill gestures were 'off the table'. The option was not a perfect solution but it was the one that would impact the least residents and was the best of the options available.

Ultimately the Minister for Corrections withdrew the offer after Council did not accept the option. After doing everything possible to have a new entry/exit constructed and to remove the burden felt by hundreds of residents along the current entry/exit routes, while at the same time protecting residents of Nulkaba from experiencing similar problems, our work resulted in nothing changing. I will continue to work with the Minister for Corrections to achieve the best possible outcome for residents.

Here to help

As your local State Member for the Electorate of Cessnock I can help by:

- Advocating on your behalf with issues such as housing, police, education, roads, transport, health and community services
- Writing to Ministers on your behalf seeking their assistance in resolving issues you may have with the NSW Government or its departments
- Arranging milestone anniversary and birthday congratulatory messages

Connect with me

ADDRESS: 118 Vincent Street, Cessnock NSW 2325

POSTAL ADDRESS: PO Box 242, Cessnock NSW 2325

PHONE: 4991 1466

TOLL-FREE PHONE: 1300 550 114

FAX: 4991 1103

EMAIL: cessnock@parliament.nsw.gov.au

WEBSITE: www.claytonbarr.com.au

FACEBOOK: ClaytonBarrMP