11 May 2004
Outback roads continue to miss out on $5M a year

The Howard Government's Budget completes four years of Federal neglect for 9,000km of outback roads in the Northern Territory.

“This is a slap in the face to the Territory's cattlemen and all those living in isolated communities,” Transport and Infrastructure Minister Dr Chris Burns said. “They've been lobbying as hard as we have for the $5m a year we're missing out on.

“It's an insult to the pastoral industry, the mining industry, the tourism industry, and every other group of Territorians that depends on outback roads.”

The Prime Minister acknowledged last month that the Territory's 9,000km of unincorporated roads were missing out because the “Roads to Recovery Programme” distributes funds through councils and shires.

Apart from Litchfield Shire and the recently formed Nyirranggulung Mardrulk Ngadberre Regional Authority in the East Katherine region, there aren't any shires in the NT.

So the unincorporated roads don't receive funding from Roads to Recovery, leaving the Territory Government struggling to maintain them out of its NT Roads budget.

At the Australian Transport Council meeting in Perth on 30 April, Dr Burns tackled Federal Roads Minister Ian Campbell and Federal Transport Minister John Anderson on the anomaly.

“Senator Campbell asked for a submission, and said he'd try to address the issue in the Budget,” Dr Burns said.

“I faxed him our argument as requested last Thursday, but it has clearly fallen on deaf ears.

“We've put a lot of extra funding into roads, and we need the Commonwealth to pull its weight.

“It's a shame we don't get as much as the NSW electorate of Gwydir. They got more than $40 million over four years from Roads to Recovery, while the whole of the Territory has received just $20 million.

“Of course, Gwydir is Mr Anderson's electorate.

“What's he doing down there? Paving the streets with gold?”