

Mayoral Media Post – January 2019

A big thank you to all residents who attended the public meeting in Walcha to discuss the recent storm. There was a large crowd, estimated at over 160 people who were updated with information that is currently to hand. Telstra had a tough spot, which was of their own making, and apologised for their delay. While it is great that they recognised their shortcoming it still remains that we were without their service for at least 14 days. Nothing can be done about what has happened, but it still feels like they got a “get out of jail for free card”. Many worthwhile points were raised from the floor on this issue and hopefully Telstra can implement some of these to improve their service and communication in these situations. The opportunity for one on one engagement following their presentation was the most useful part to many who attended. Barnaby Joyce and Kevin Anderson spoke of the devastation, its effect on production and the role that their respective Governments play in the rehabilitation of the land and infrastructure. Some people questioned me on the reason for the LLS Sustainable Land Management representatives being there. In the cleanup process there are still legislations in place that applies and it is up to the individuals how they handle this. It was an important part of the overall conversation.

Looking ahead Karen Zirkler from NE Landcare spoke of the funding opportunities for the revegetation of farmland.

There have been numerous questions raised over Council's role in this disaster. Obviously as mentioned before the timing over the Christmas/ New Year break was the biggest issue. Many departments did not return to work until the second week in January. There was no reason to hold a meeting earlier than we did, as we couldn't assemble all the guests in one room until Monday and we did not have enough information to warrant calling one. The application for Natural Disaster Declaration is divided into two sections, urban and rural, with the rural application being more complex to collate the information therefore and takes longer to process. Hopefully this will be declared in the next couple of days and there will be clarification of what funding and assistance this gives access to. Council will continue to clean up their part of the roadway and liaise with landholders over fencing etc.

While a lot of questions over the way forward in the cleanup and the financing of it may not have been fully answered, as information becomes available we will send it out through Facebook, Council Webpage and local print media. I would like to thank everyone for the respect shown to the speakers. In many cases they are only delivering a message on behalf of a larger organisation and while Telstra does not carry a great reputation, they are the only ones who cover much of the rural areas and must do this competitively.

Clr Eric Noakes
Mayor of Walcha