



LOCKDOWN

A collective sigh of relief could be heard last Thursday when the announcement that our LGA would be released from lockdown. Compared to Sydney, Melbourne and many other areas ours was a short one and makes you realise the disruption to life that many are living. The weighing up of the health and mental cost against economic cost to the country and smaller communities must weigh heavy on those with the responsibility of making these high up decisions. Hopefully this will give our local businesses, heavily impacted by this shut down, an opportunity to trade on and put a few dollars in the bank. They have certainly suffered from everything thrown at them over the past three years.

I believe our community should be justly proud of our attitude and willingness to comply to the Public Health Order. Everyone seemed to mask up, QR code and show respect. Much has been written and reported on what the Walcha General Practice staff have done for us, and the true magnitude of this will probably only dawn of them when after its all over they take time to reflect on the mammoth task they undertook and prevailed.

The news that Yass River Council only spent two days out of lockdown before slipping back in due to a positive case is a sobering reminder of what a knife edge we are still on. One bad decision can see us in the same position. One thing I have learned over the last month is keep your hair short at all times. It seems to grow so much quicker in a spring lockdown. On the bright side we are beginning to recognise people with their masks on.

RENEWABLE ENERGY ZONES

Running parallel to renewable energy projects around the New England is a Renewable Energy Zone. The State Government is setting up four of these around the State in an effort to secure electricity supplies with the imminent closure of the coal fired power stations in the Hunter Valley. The pilot Orana REZ around the Central West is ahead of the NE Zone with the aim that the NE REZ will be legislated late this year. Last Friday General Manager Barry Omundson and myself had a meeting with Energy Corporation, a State Government statutory body tasked with introducing them, around how they propose to operate. It will basically run from Tenterfield to Tamworth, east to the National Parks and west to the edge of the ranges. The boundary is fairly fluid but will be settled in soon.

Recently an express of interest was held to fill the 8gigawatt generation capacity of allocation to the REZ and 34gig of generation capacity was received. Many of these projects are concepts through to others that are going through the planning process. They include solar, wind, battery storage, pumped hydro and hydrogen generation.

One point made was that there is inadequate infrastructure to carry this electricity to the power hungry Sydney and Newcastle Basins and will require the construction of another transmission line from around Armidale to Liddel to connect to current transmission lines. The current lines are near capacity and the full potential of the REZ cannot be realised without its completion. No path has been chosen for this, but hopefully it will follow the



current line and stay to our west. Energy Corporation told us they are committed to engaging with the community around the REZ, it's impacts and outcomes. The path of this interaction is once again obviously dependent on restrictions but will take place when it can.

DISRUPTION

COVID has certainly changed the way we live and operate. Walcha Council is no different and many projects we had hoped to move along are stalled. Repairs to the swimming pool and solar panels to lower the cost of running the gym have fallen victim to restrictions around travel. The risk of bringing outside contractors into town was seen as too much of a risk. Projects like the pool will now have to be postponed until next year so as to not interrupt the season.

MOVING SEATS

The announcement a couple of weeks ago that Walcha LGA would be moving from the Tamworth electorate to the Northern Tablelands electorate for the next State Election, to be held in March 2023, continues our constant shifting to even up voting numbers. Generally I feel this will make little difference to our day to day running of Council with Kevin Anderson having given us solid support and advocacy. Obviously depending on election outcome I believe the representation we would receive from the current Northern Tablelands representative, Adam Marshall, will be very strong as he certainly has the runs on the board in looking after his electorate.

Clr Eric Noakes
Mayor of Walcha