



RENEWABLE ENERGY ZONE FORUM

In the Apsley Advocate, 17 August 2022 issue, there is a press release for a Renewable Energy Zone Forum next Wednesday 24 August at 12:30pm. To simplify this release the meeting will engage Energy Corporation and Department of Planning & Environment (DPE) to give information around the New England Renewable Energy Zone, but DPE will also present on the Environmental Impact Statement process for projects. This is an information session and not a debate on the merits of renewable energy. Personally after my conversations with Energy Co I disagree that this should be focused on landholders as alluded to in the release and anyone interested in the pathway of projects should attend. While the start time is far from ideal I encourage every interested person to read the release and attend if possible. There is a link to RSVP and register a question in the press release.

OLD HOSPITAL

The remainder of this column is once again devoted to the 'Old Hospital'. I still receive many questions and comments around its future. Quite often there is a *Thumbs Down* to its condition. The following email chain sums up the lack of enthusiasm by the State Government to assist. I believe it speaks for itself. I could include all the letters written over the years in relation to it but suffice to say the most recent will do. Maybe we need a concerted effort on behalf of the community for some progress. At this stage I'm not sure what that will be, but everything until now has not worked.

Dear Kevin,

I'm writing again in relation to the 'Old Hospital' in Walcha. Over 5 years of pushing and trying to have an outcome for this abandoned infrastructure I feel I have gotten nowhere.

I won't reiterate the issues and problems that have been raised in that time except to say that my community and myself are extremely frustrated. Surely there must be a pathway to solve this ongoing problem. The building continues to deteriorate and cause both social and health issues to our community. On top of this it still costs our local MPS. I struggle to make any traction with this issue that has been ongoing for 12 years. There must be a pathway forward and I ask you to assist us along that path.

Clr Eric Noakes

*The Hon Brad Hazzard MP
Minister for Health*

I am making representation on behalf of Councillor Eric Noakes, Mayor of Walcha Council, regarding the 'Old Walcha Hospital site', Walcha.

The Walcha Hospital closed in 2007 when a modern and purpose built Multi Purpose Service opened on a new site. The old hospital was decommissioned and became the focus of a Local Aboriginal Land Claim under the Native Title Act.

Since the decommissioning, the buildings have been severely vandalized as well as a significant amount of disturbed asbestos has been identified on the site. The building and



the site are becoming more derelict, and the cost to restore and monitor activity at the site will be increasing.

I am informed that the repair of the damage to the site is the responsibility of the Multi Purpose Service and this will be draining funds and resources that could be put to better use. The Walcha Council Mayor fully understands the complexities of an Aboriginal Land Claim and the sensitivity around these issues, however from a community viewpoint there has been no action for 11 years and the Mayor believes there could be commercial options for the use of this site should that possibility arise.

On behalf of Walcha Council, it would be appreciated if an update on the 'old Walcha Hospital site' could be provided.

Thank you for your assistance and I look forward to your reply.

Hon Kevin Anderson MP

30 June 2022

Dear Kevin

Thank you for writing on behalf of Councillor Eric Noakes, Mayor of Walcha Council, about the former Walcha Hospital site.

I acknowledge Councillor Noakes' concerns about the site and appreciate your advocacy on this matter.

Mr Michael DiRienzo, Chief Executive, Hunter New England Local Health District, confirms an Aboriginal Land Claim was lodged against the site a number of years ago and remains undetermined.

Mr DiRienzo acknowledges the long delay in the land claim being resolved. The NSW Department of Planning & Environment is managing the land claim and consulting with the NSW Aboriginal Lands Council. Regrettably, the District is unable to negotiate the sale or transfer of the site until the land claim is determined. I am assured the District is maintaining the old hospital buildings and grounds as safely and securely as possible but do acknowledge that the long period of non-use may be making them unsightly. I am sure that the District is doing whatever it can to facilitate a conclusion to the land claim progress.

Thank you again for writing. For more information please contact Mr Eddie Pirillo, Property Manager, Hunter New England Local Health District, at eddie.pirillo@health.nsw.gov.au or on 4921 4917.

Brad Hazzard MP, Minister for Health

3 August 2022

Dear Kevin

Thank you for passing on the reply from Minister for Health Hazzard's Office. As stated in your email this is an ongoing issue over 15 years and despite my, and previous Mayor's efforts has gone nowhere. I find the Ministers' response to show a lack of understanding that this is having on my community and dismissive of the real issue. In my 6 years of interaction over this no one has been able to tell me where the delay is coming from, except it's under a land claim. I have been from Health to Housing and Crown Lands and around again and yet



no outcome. There must be some avenue for a determination. I reiterate that this is a dilapidated building in a prime visible location and not just a block of land.

As I said I have contacted every department of the current government that I can, to try and have a resolution and I am no further ahead. The frustration for both myself, our Council and the community of Walcha that there is no forward movement in 15 years is disappointing in the least.

The constant call from governments at all levels for housing and accommodation is being felt in Walcha too, yet we have a facility including the hospital, a house and building blocks laying idle that could be utilized to alleviate this problem.

The community of Walcha asks you to escalate this issue to an authority that can bring forward a resolution.

Clr Eric Noakes

11 August 2022

Clr Eric Noakes
Mayor of Walcha