



FROM THE MAYOR:

2020 THE YEAR THAT WAS!

2020 was a year of mixed fortunes for Walcha. Starting with the bushfires and drought still severely impacting our local government area for the first month, through to our local Show just proceeding before COVID-19 threw life as we knew it into confusion. So far this pandemic has not severely effected most of us in Walcha but it still hovers over our community and poses just as big a risk as it did in Autumn. 2021 currently looks like showing no great relief from this virus as it still infiltrates pockets of Australia.

Not to dwell on the negative and look at the brighter side this has turned into one of the better seasons many people can remember and has restored a sense of liveability to the land again and buoyant stock prices have started to fill the financial void left by the expenses of drought. These high stock prices are reflective of lower numbers and therefore temper the higher prices to an extent.

Couple with this, the proactive reaction by both the Australian and State Governments has assisted businesses, farmers and Local Government. From Councils perspective this extra funding has allowed for road upgrades, small community projects, Council infrastructure upgrades and as is currently advertised, the opportunity for local groups to access funding for community led and inclusive events.

This increase in grant funding has put pressure on Council's internal resources and required outsourcing of both scoping and on ground work. This in turn benefits local businesses and speeds up the delivery of these programs.

Each year Council is adding to the Christmas Decorations in the business area and this year sees the addition of a Star and a Reindeer to the menagerie. Coupled with the incentive scheme to encourage homeowners to decorate their own houses our town looks festive and brighter. Thanks to those people who decorate their houses and gardens for the public benefit.

Our town continues to thrive and remain robust, wit new businesses taking their place alongside our existing ones. It is encouraging to see residents taking the opportunity to open in what can be seen as challenging times. Their vision and commitment is well founded and broadens the opportunities in Walcha.

Early in the New Year should see the Community Gym open behind the Squash Courts. The idea for a 'community gym' is built on the operating model that has seen it run successfully by the "gym ladies" and has seen it grow into a successful operation. The Group that ran the gym have set the direction for this larger facility Council will be more heavily involved in its operations, but with the assistance of a Committee that will have the role to make recommendations to Council. Interested



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parties can apply to Council to be part of this Committee and have an input in its future.

State Government funding of up to \$9 Million to build an off stream storage to secure our water supply has to be seen as one of the biggest coups that Walcha has seen. An unaffordable infrastructure build that Council could never finance on its own its funding is the outcome of lobbying and following the "process". While at many times this process seemed exasperating it is there for a reason and in our case worked well.

Our two local politicians, Barnaby Joyce at a Federal level and Kevin Anderson as our State Representative are integral parts of our community. Their investment, hard work and lobbying for our community can never be overstated. Local Government relies heavily on the two tiers of government above us and to have two dedicated representatives to support us makes our job so much easier.

The sad news as Christmas closes in was the passing of long term Council employee, Bernard Lynch. Bernard lived life to the fullest and gave so much back to the community over the years. Taken far too young we offer our condolences to Anne and his family.

To our Councillors who set strategy for the long term direction of Walcha, thank you on behalf of the community. I believe we are an eclectic group who are passionate about the future of our community and our desire to place Walcha in a strong financial and sustainable position.

Finally, on behalf of Sheree and myself, Councillors and Staff we wish everyone a Merry Christmas. How and why you choose to celebrate we hope you find time for family. Travel safe if you are on the roads and return home safely. One of the greatest messages at Christmas is that three beers does not make any dad a better skateboarder and the Emergency Department at hospitals need a quiet day too. On that note to those who have to work on Christmas Day thank you for your dedication and being away from family. While January 1 is really only a date on a calendar we hope that the New Year is a happy, healthy and prosperous time and the word "resilient" can retreat back into the dictionary. Maybe it can be replaced by "robust".

Clr Eric Noakes
Mayor of Walcha