



THE YEAR THAT WAS

2019 will probably go down as one of the most frustrating and trying years for many residents, and with a focus on Walcha has seen our Local Government Area (LGA) suffer drought, fire and road closures. The financial impact is yet to be measured, and in many ways it may not be measurable. If trucks aren't taking our livestock out of the district they are bringing hay and grain in. Lambing and calving percentages are well down and this augers poorly for when the season does turn. As I found, decisions made in March had ongoing impacts in spring. I believe you could feel a palpable change in the mood of the town when no rain came in September. I think there was a feeling that rain would come.

These times reach far further than farms, businesses in town suffer downturn in trade, which most don't have the room for. If we lose these businesses now many may never return. Skilled workers such as shearers, fencers and farm workers now have to travel long distances to procure work and this has a devastating impact on families.

There is no easy solutions to these issues. Both State and Federal Governments offer help, but to pinpoint and plug the right hole over a large area is difficult and I would imagine frustrating. Grant funding from both these bodies has helped, but the financial help offered in these times does not always pick up all who are impacted.

We can say our farmers are stoic and resilient, but the task of walking out the door in the morning to start the feeding cycle slowly wears everyone down. Our animals are our lifeblood and we don't like to see them run towards every vehicle that moves, or walk onto a truck after decades of dedicated breeding. All we can do is hang in there and wait for drought to end, reassess and pick up the pieces and move forward again. We are lucky to have a supportive community and other communities that see our issues, and rally to help us.

Highs and Lows

Besides the drought, this year has bought a collection of highs and lows for Walcha. The ongoing bush fire saga has devastated the eastern section of our shire with loss of infrastructure, animals both native and domestic and taken limited feed resources. It's not hard to find experienced people who can and have said this is a disaster waiting to happen. While this is not the right time to analyse this we can only hope that some good comes out of it. The fire still continues to impact a large tract of land to the south of Yarrowitch and east at Moona. A result of this is the extended closure of the Oxley Highway to the east. While the impact of the fire on the forest is massive the resulting decline in business trade for town is crippling. This just goes to show the income generated from tourism to our community. There are a couple of major east west routes suffering this inconvenience but that does not help us. As a Council we are pushing hard for some form of resolution with our local member Kevin Anderson.



The bike festival was both bad then good. As I said earlier if nothing else the original failure gave us the impetus to take it over, run it successfully and provide a boost to town. The Woman's Gathering was a roaring success under trying conditions. Funding continued to flow for infrastructure with the Function Centre at the Showground being the shining star. A great concept employing local contractors and providing the community with a functional asset for years to come. It's great to have visionary people in town to oversee these projects. Next year will see the completion of the Community Storage Centre and our new Gym. With rain we will see the upgrading of Thunderbolts Way and the completion of more bridges.

Supportive Communities

Following on from the above point the interaction with the Central Coast community and mainly the Terrigal Trotters is humbling. Every Preschool child will have a much brighter Christmas and gift vouchers donated by them will help many families. Yvonne and Rob Mullen deserve our gratitude and thanks for this project. This community has taken us into their arms and lifted our spirits when it is most needed. There is more to come from this group and it is covered elsewhere in these papers.

Other individuals, clubs and businesses are also sending money, water and consumables to our Service Clubs and individuals. These gestures which are driven by individuals give us a boost at Christmas time.

GREETINGS

However and why you choose to celebrate Christmas I hope that over this period you find time to reflect on what is good amongst the bad. On behalf of Sheree and myself and all Walcha Councillors we wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. May we all find solace with your family and friends, enjoy their company and find comfort in the things we can control.

Clr Eric Noakes
Mayor of Walcha