



## **NEW YEAR**

Although we are already over two weeks into 2022 and Christmas is well behind us, on behalf of Council I would like to wish everyone a happy and safe New Year. School will be back sooner than we think and February always seems to fly. Hopefully this year will see COVID-19 become less of an issue and allow the freedoms we are slowly winning back become more commonplace and less restrictive. A year ago everyone seemed to be fearful of being the first one to bring the virus to town, but as was always going to be the case it came anyway and we now must live with it and work around it. While I have no medical experience, from what I've read the often quoted "I might as well catch it and get it over and done with" doesn't really work with this one. The risks certainly outweigh the benefits. Hopefully for our towns sake our annual events such as the Races and Show can proceed over the coming months.

## **NEW COUNCILLORS**

With the delayed Local Government Elections finally being decided for Walcha just before Christmas there was just time to swear the Councillors in and get some structure in place ready for the new year. Congratulations to Nena Hicks, Anne-Marie Pointing, Aurora Reilly, Greg Schaefer and Mark Berry as new Councillors and Scott Kermode, Deputy Mayor, and Kevin Ferrier as returning Councillors.

Training in Local Government and the compliance around our roles will consume the first few workshops and I believe this group has great potential to keep moving Walcha forward.

On behalf of the elected Councillors thanks for the confidence shown in us.

Another outcome of the election was the majority vote in favour of dismantling Wards. Having been part of the Local Government Area (LGA) since the amalgamation of Apsley and Walcha Shires I personally was happy to see them go. In these times Councillors do and must focus on the whole LGA, not just a section of it. At times under Wards potentially good Councillors may miss out, and hopefully it may attract more candidates to contest the next election.

## **IPART**

From a budgeting perspective for all Councils the coming year is going to be tough. The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) saw fit to set rate increases at 0.7%, the lowest increase in over 20 years, which is probably great news if you are a ratepayer, understandably no one wants to part with hard earned money, especially to any government. Despite this, we can only provide services with what we have, and anyone who has seen the price rises in inputs over the last year would be aware that this mediocre increase is really unsustainable in business. Wages will rise by over 2%, fuel has seen large increases and cost shifting by governments onto councils means compliance takes precedence over core business.



Walcha Council has very little ability to fund “own source revenue”. This is revenue that is not sourced from fees and charges, but comes from business conducted by Council. This may include parking fees and fines, infrastructure hire or service provision. The provision of grants by both Australian and State Governments is becoming the only way for councils to do larger projects. As the next budget is formulated, like many councils, the question around what service level the community wants and at what cost will become paramount.

## **OFF CREEK STORAGE**

Just a quick update on our towns water storage. Hopefully this project will be completed this year, but I can't mention it without flagging my frustration at the compliance, rules and regulations around what I believe should be an “easily doable” project. I thought that sourcing the funds would be the difficult part, and while it was onerous, what I am discovering along the path of construction is frustrating. I do understand the reason for some of compliance but the added cost and time this brings puts projects at risk. Everyone from Ministers to Car Park Attendant seems to want to have an input. Maybe I haven't been in government long enough yet to accept this level of bureaucracy.

## **NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS**

“I'm going to get fitter and lose a few kilos” is probably the New Years resolution most stated with conviction at midnight on New Years Eve. Anyone who has said this and wants to carry on with it should take a look at the new gym behind the squash courts. With around \$60,000 worth of new equipment recently added the gym offers a great place to take the first step on this path. Reasonably priced and no doubt a great facility drop into Council and get a week membership and give it a go.

Coupled with the gym the pool has had an injection of funds and is improving all the time. As a fifty year old facility much of it was getting tired and apparently the new solar heating system maintains a comfortable swimming temperature.

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Mayor of Walcha