



BUSINESS BREAKFAST

The Business Breakfast aimed at our local town businesses attracted over seventy participants to the Bowling Club a couple of Friday's ago to hear the Honourable Barnaby Joyce speak on the Federal Budget and Federal Government Assistance through drought, bushfires and COVID. Barnaby always puts it in plain language and his presence was greatly appreciated.

Representing the Rural Financial Counselling Service, Rural Business Support, was Tania O'Hara and Sandy Standford. I spent time with Tania before the breakfast in Walcha engaging business owners on the availability of grants etc through these trying times. I did learn there is a lot of available and many owners are too busy to locate and access the information required. The scope of available assistance is varied and covers areas you may not have thought of. What is offered is a free service and these girls will help with all the paperwork as well. I have spoken to Tania about doing this again around March next year if there is the demand. This will be in time for the end of the financial year and there may be other resilience assistance available by then. The message from the Government is still do not self assess as this help is aimed at keeping businesses open and financial secure as the economy hopefully picks up.

BLAZE AID

Any community in Australia effected by a natural disaster is well aware of BlazeAid. A volunteer and not for profit organization they are one of the first to turn up and lend valuable assistance to the victims of disasters. Led by Greg and Gillian Kirkman BlazeAid has just finished their second visit to Walcha providing relief to Yarrowitch, and more recently Nowendoc. "Kirky" is a straight forward leader with the ability to get the job done and a minimum of fuss and therefore creates excellent outcomes. With the hundreds of kilometres of fence impacted, landowners are appreciative of their excellent work. Not only are landholders assisted through making farms workable again but local businesses benefit as they buy all goods locally. Even though the bushfires were twelve months ago they are very fresh in the minds of those impacted and what BlazeAid brings is not only physical help, but also lifts the spirits of farmers. A special mention also to the local community leaders who engaged with both Backtrack and BlazeAid for the benefit of their respective communities. A great NFP organisations and community partnership.

COUNCIL OFFICES

As you have probably read in past columns Walcha Council has been the recipient of many grants from Federal and State Governments aimed at updating and building infrastructure. The upside of these grants is that our roads, bridges and public facilities get a much needed upgrade that could never be funded internally by Council. Coupled with this is the external Government funding of staff to assist in resilience and rebuilding around the impact of last years bushfires. The current downside to Council is that these grants require the scoping of projects, completing the applications, timelines and finally acquittal of



spending. The bottom line is this is public funds and every box must be ticked as part of the agreement.

Our budget has increased by around \$8 Million and the large percentage of this will end up as on ground work, some pretty, some practical but all requiring adequate administration. Our Council office space cannot cope with these extra requirements as our current staff work hard to complete their day to day workload. Permanent Council Offices are not a solution as these grants are most likely going to be a spike in the workload. Management saw the need, and Councillors backed the proposal for rental of office space in Walcha for staff to deliver these projects. The upside of renting this space is that we continue to deliver these and hopefully more projects to the community in the future.

COMMUNITY CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

As renewable energy comes closer to Walcha and the Winterbourne Wind Farm is in its planning and approvals stage a requirement is that a Community Consultative Committee is established. This gives local residents an opportunity to be involved in this process, and is not an onerous undertaking. An advertisement for this Committee, with all relevant information is included in the Apsley Advocate with the closing date later this month. This wind farm proposal will most likely be the first of other like developments to come to our LGA, and this offers residents an opportunity to participate.

Clr Eric Noakes
Mayor of Walcha