
Annual Report



2020 -2021



Apsley River Levee Banks

Walcha Council
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Members of Council

Councillors

Walcha Council is divided into four (4) Wards and each Ward has two Councillors:



Ward A

Clr Peter Blomfield &
Clr Rachael Wellings



Ward B

Clr Eric Noakes -
Mayor &
Clr Clint Lyon



Ward C

Clr Scott Kermode &
Clr Jennifer Kealey –
Deputy Mayor



Ward D

Clr William Heazlett &
Clr Kevin Ferrier



Executive Staff

Barry Omundson
General Manager



Lacey Latham
Director Environment & Development



Peter Murray
Director Infrastructure



Karen Kermode
Director Community & Tourism



Council Services

Council Meetings

Council Meetings are held on the last Wednesday of each month at 3pm in the Council Chambers, Hamilton Street, Walcha. Members of the public are invited and welcome to attend open Council Meetings. Business papers are available at the meeting upon request to the General Manager.

Meetings with Residents

Council held Regional Meetings throughout the local government area annually. Council holds these meetings to inform residents of and to receive public input into its activities.

Property Identification

Residents are requested to ensure that their property is clearly, correctly and prominently identified. Council has a standard rural address sign available for purchase. Please visit our website: www.walcha.nsw.gov.au to fill in the form or alternatively contact Council Office. Various services such as ambulance and trades regularly draw attention to problems associated with inadequate property identification. If residents of Walcha are in doubt about street numbers, please contact Councils office.

Correspondence

Correspondence for inclusion in the Business paper closes 12 noon on the Monday, nine days prior to the Council Meeting.

Committee Meetings

Walcha Council Community Care (WCCC): provides services that support people to stay at home and to be more independently in the community. It is auspiced by Walcha Council and jointly funded by Commonwealth and State Governments. The Committee provides advice to Council on policy matters and programs specifically for our community.

Walcha Beautification & Tidy Towns Committee: advises Council on matters relating to the beautification of the town and district and tree planting program. Citizen representation sought.

Walcha Preschool Advisory Committee: advises Council on policy matters and strategic issues regarding the management of the Walcha Preschool.

Walcha Arts Advisory Committee: advises Council on future public art projects.

Walcha Tourism Advisory Committee: advises Council on future tourism promotion.

Walcha Youth Advisory Committee: Purpose is to engage with the youth of Walcha and allow for their input into the Youth programs developed in the Walcha area.

Walcha Aboriginal Advisory Committee: Purpose is to advise Council on Aboriginal matters.

Appointments with Executive Staff

Staff endeavour to make themselves available to meet with the public, however business commitments take them out of the office on occasions. This particularly applies to Engineering staff who are required to carry out field work. There are occasions when members of the public call at Council's offices only to be told that the person they wish to see is out of the office. In an endeavour to avoid this, it is suggested that whenever possible, an appointment be made.

Garbage Collections

Garbage bins are collected on Thursday morning each week throughout the whole of the local government area. The Recycling and Green Waste bins are collected alternate weeks – to see the Waste Collections dates please log onto our website: www.walcha.nsw.gov.au under Infrastructure or call into our Office. Residents are requested to ensure that mobile garbage bins are placed as close to the kerb as possible with the handles facing the footpath. Plastic bags and cardboard boxes are not approved garbage receptacles and the contractor will only collect Council supplied mobile garbage bins. When dumping rubbish at the Waste Transfer Station, please ensure that garbage is placed in the appropriate designated areas. Residents are requested to ensure that when transporting rubbish to the garbage depot, the load is securely covered.

Bush Fire Control

Landholders can assist in the prevention of bushfires by maintaining fire breaks and reducing excess vegetation before the onset of the Bush Fire Danger Period which commences on 1 October each year and runs through until 31 March of the following year unless otherwise varied. The lighting of fires in the open during this period is prohibited unless a Permit to Burn is obtained from the Rural Fire Service. You can contact the New England Zone Office on 6771 2400 or the Permanent After Hours Duty Number 6732 4473. Please report all fires by dialling 000.

Library

The Walcha Branch of the Central Northern Regional Library is situated in Derby Street and affords residents a comprehensive collection of material including books, magazines and cassettes.

Library hours are:

Monday:	8:30am to 1:00pm; 2:00pm to 5:00pm
Tuesday:	8:30am to 1:00pm; 2:00pm to 5:00pm
Wednesday:	Closed
Thursday:	8:30am to 1:00pm; 2:00pm to 5:00pm

Friday: 8:30am to 1:00pm; 2:00pm to 5:00pm
Phone 6774 2550



Walcha Campdraft is an Annual Event held in January
Photo: Taken by Lacey Latham – Amanda Nicholson riding Chex

Mayoral Report

Twelve months has made such a difference to the opening sentiment of this report. Last year it covered drought, bushfires and COVID-19. Whilst COVID-19 remains and the closure of the Oxley Highway to the east was devastating to local businesses, good seasons and accompanying record stock prices have lifted both confidence and the economy of our community. COVID-19 came at a cost to Council as it did with any business and has had a negative effect to the bottom line of the budget.

As the final Annual Report for this Council I wish to thank my fellow Councillors for their support of myself, the Staff at Council and the direction for Walcha and I know we have taken this seriously and gone above and beyond to achieve this. You have given all to this community.

With elections due in December four of current Councillors have decided to step down and concentrate on other pursuits. Councillors Kealey, Wellings, Heazlett and Blomfield have contributed much to this community over varying periods and their input will be severely missed. Hopefully some of you will see fit to return in the future and continue this contribution. Your experience and vision will leave a void.

The highlight of this year was the securing of \$11 million to build our off river storage to underpin our water supply. To me this long and demanding journey shows the funding process does work, even if we question it at times. Tick all boxes and prove your case and the governments will help you. Currently in the pre tender stage next year will see the earth move.

Other successes include, but are not restricted to the gym opening, extension of spending the \$10 Million on Thunderbolts Way, funding sourced for Lions Park and Skate Park upgrades, levee bank lighting in the procurement stage and the way our smaller communities have used funding to improve their halls and grounds. The focus on replacing aged timber bridges currently sees only nine bridges unfunded and hopefully these will be replaced with concrete structures in the coming years.

There are always more that we would like to do. The long awaited Waste Strategy has stalled partly because of staff resignation and the Council will need to pick this up and finalise it. The Ramps Policy needs tweaking to make

it more effective. The truck wash is now open despite the problems this project raised.

A highlight of the year was the appointment of highly experienced General Manager Barry Omundson to start in June, with the resignation of Anne Moddero to pursue a management role at Transport for NSW. Barry's vision and knowledge will stand Walcha Council and community in good stead into the future. His ability to overview our strategic planning and delivery program and have them firmly in place will give the new Council an excellent foundation to build on.

To our local members Kevin Anderson and Barnaby Joyce thank you for your support of Walcha. You are never more than a phone call away and have given us great access to politicians and bureaucrats when needed. Our community would not be in the solid place it is without your input.

Once again to our Staff at Walcha Council thank you for your commitment and dedication. We are tasked with delivering to many sectors of the community within guidelines, legislation and funding timeframes. These require a mix of skills; scoping, budgeting, delivery and reporting and as the public face of Council you do this with conviction, dedication, confidence and compassion. Walcha Council runs well because of you.

To my fellow Councillors, Clr Lyon and Clr Ferrier, I wish you good luck in the upcoming election and to elected Clr Kermode your experience will be valuable to the new Council.

Finally, thank you to the community of Walcha. I know all Councillors feel it has been a pleasure to serve you. You have given us respect and the room to do our job., and your gratitude at our successes. We live and work in a leading community that if we work together to maintain can only improve. As your Mayor I am humbled to lead this Council and represent you at State and Commonwealth level. May the next Council carry on this legacy.



Sincerely
Clr Eric H Noakes
Mayor of Walcha

General Manager's Report

It is with great pleasure that I pen my message to you, as General Manager for the 2020 – 2021 Annual Report, which also encapsulates the end of a five (5) year term of Council.

As will be evident within this Annual Report Council have achieved a significant amount against both our Delivery Program and our Operational Plan. This was primarily achieved through the leadership of former General Manager Anne Moddero, who left Council in the year and then Interim General Manager Chris Weber, who filled the leadership role for a number of months prior to my appointment.

Our largest project to date is the Off Creek Storage which will see a 300ML dam constructed by the end of 2022. Design work was completed early in the year and most recently Council has entered into a professional services contract through an EPCM (Engineering, Procurement, Construction Management) arrangement with well known engineers Hunter H2O. Mayor Eric Noakes has been instrumental in pushing this critical \$11M project to where it is today, particularly so in securing additional funding from the Deputy Prime Minister and our supportive State Government. Other projects of note include our new Truck Wash Bay which is planned to open in October 2021 with \$598,000 from Fixing Country Truck Washes, \$252,000 from Local Roads & Community Infrastructure, \$275,000 from Walcha Council and \$2,000 from industry. Walcha's new state of the art gymnasium was opened in April and usage remains high, with further expansion of equipment planned.

Works completed under the Local Roads & Community Infrastructure Grant agreements include an additional \$155,000 of gravel re-sheeting to improve wet weather access along with \$200,000 in local roads resealing to reduce road maintenance costs. Our work on Thunderbolts Way continues as we reseal, rehabilitate, heavy patch and shoulder grade various sections as funding becomes available.

A staff culture survey was undertaken late last year and a culture plan developed based on values, which is set to see a better place to work at and an enhanced customer experience in the months and years ahead. In terms of culture our safety practices are well below where they should be and an improved safety culture will be paramount for the forthcoming financial year and beyond.

Our participation in Namoi Unlimited has been fruitful and we value our role in this wider Joint Organisation.

COVID-19 of course contributed to delays in many projects and along with the closure of the Oxley Highway to the coast dramatically affected our region's economic sustainability, yet having been through most recently drought, bushfires and tornadoes Walcha's community strength showed once again as we overcame all hurdles. The strength of this community is one aspect in my short time as General Manager that will stay with me forever. This strength was emphasised by all our community groups, sporting clubs, service clubs and not for profits who continue to play an important role in this community. Thank you for that continued support. Also, thank you to Interim General Manager Chris Weber for his comprehensive handover, stabilising leadership and his continued support.

This Annual Report brings to a close this long term of Council and it is appropriate that I acknowledge and thank this Councillor team, very well lead by Mayor Eric Noakes, who along with our dedicated staff have achieved much over this period. I thank the Mayor, Councillors, Staff and our Community for their efforts and I look forward to leading Walcha Council for many years.



Sincerely
Barry Omundson
General Manager

Statutory Reporting

The *Local Government Act, 1993* imposes various reporting requirements upon the Council. In compliance with those requirements the following information is provided:

End of Term 2016 – 2021 Report

In the year of an Ordinary Election the Annual Report must also include an outline of achievements in implementing the Community Strategic Plan. A copy of the End of Term 2016 – 2021 is Appendix A of this Annual Report.

Achievements in Implementing Council Delivery Program

Under *Section 428 of the Local Government Act 1993* Council is required to report on its achievements in implementing its Delivery program. These achievements are detailed in Appendix B of this report titled "Achievements of Delivery Program".

Audited Financial Statements

Included with this Annual Report is a copy of the Auditor's Report to Council for the financial year ended 30 June 2021 and a full set of audited financial reports as Appendix C, D & E.

State of the Environment Report

The NSW *Local Government Act 1993 Section 404* states that the annual report in the year of the ordinary election must include a report (State of the Environment Report) as to the state of the environment in the local government area in relation to the objectives for the environment established by the Community Strategic Plan.

A complete State of the Environment Report is attached as Appendix F.

Infrastructure Assets

Residents are referred to Schedule 7 of the Special Schedules Reports (Appendix D) for details as to the condition of Infrastructure Assets.

Legal Proceedings

All legal proceedings for this year were for action to collect outstanding rates, charges and debtors. All costs associated with the collection of outstanding debts are recovered from the debtors. Legal costs in the amount of \$11,933 for:

- Former General Manager Performance / Contract;
- Procurement;
- Compulsory acquisition of vacant land in Derby Street.

Mayoral/Councillor Fees, Expenses and Facilities

Councillors are provided with an I-pad for the purpose of carrying out their civic duties. A Council car is made available to Councillors for use on Council business. Councillors are provided with stationery and secretarial support. The Mayor is provided with an office, stationery, telephone and secretarial support and limited entertainment assistance.

Council meets education and training costs for all Councillors.

Council meets all accommodation costs and, in addition, out-of-pocket expenses (max. \$100 per day) incurred by all Councillors when attending conferences, seminars etc., or on the approved business of the Council. Council also provides afternoon tea and dinner in conjunction with Council meetings. This year the following costs were spent on Functions:

Function:	Councillor/s:	Amount:
ALGA – Australian Local Government Assoc – Annual Conference in Canberra	Noakes	\$1,961
Australian Water Association Conference – Tamworth	Noakes	\$1,387
Local Government NSW Conference - Virtual	Wellings	\$60
Namoi Unlimited Christmas Party	Noakes Kealey Kermode Lyon	\$2,398

Council may also meet the legal costs of Councillors who are the subject of an inquiry or against whom legal action is taken in connection with their civic duties, provided that the outcome of the inquiry or action is substantially favourable to the Councillor and subject to such assistance being reduced by the amount of any monies that may be recouped by the Councillor. A complete copy of Council's "Payment of expenses and provision of facilities for the Mayor, Councillors & Staff" Policy is attached as Appendix G.

In addition, fees are paid to all Councillors in accordance with the Local Government Act. 1993.

A summary of the cost of these fees, expenses and facilities is set out below:

Mayoral & Councillor Fees	\$118,488
Councillors Mobile Phone & iPads	\$3,462
Councillors Conferences in NSW	\$2,346
Councillor Conferences interstate	\$1,062
Councillor Training	\$2,398
Councillors Expenses \$15,767 + Travel Allowance \$8,798 =	\$24,565

Staff

The General Manager is, for the purposes of the Local Government Act, the only employee designated as "Senior Staff". The total remuneration paid to the General Manager in 2020 – 2021 was \$426,436. This amount included salary, fringe benefits, oncosts and end of contract entitlements. Fringe benefits included the provision a telephone and full private use of a motor vehicle. Oncosts included leave entitlements and superannuation. Superannuation charged to the remuneration package was calculated in accordance with the formula for contract employees who are members of the defined benefits Local Government Superannuation Scheme. This formula is based on the long term notional super contributions rate rather than the actual employer contribution paid by Council in any year. Further information on this formula can be obtained by contacting the Local Government Superannuation Scheme or Council's Chief Financial Officer.

Contracts

As per the *Local Government (General) Regulation 2005 cl 217(1)(a2)(i)(ii)*, Council entered into the following contracts over \$150,000, which are required to be reported, during 2020 – 2021:

Contract:	Awarded to:	Contract Value GST excl \$:
Construct Walcha Community Gym	Rice Construction Group	815,100
Drought Community Projects – Buildings upgrade (combined)	M & C Rose Building	295,823
Rehabilitation of 3 Road Segments	Stabilised Pavements of Australia	658,708
Construction of Mens’ Shed	M & C Rose Building	337,711
Construction of shared footpaths and cycleways	Ete Services Pty Ltd	199,729
Design and Construction of three (3) Bridges	TOBCO	1,500,795
Construction of Truck Wash Facility	Washbay Specialists	560,966

Preservation of the Environment

Council was involved in several programs to enhance and preserve the environment during the year.

Council is actively involved in recycling, working to reduce overall waste generation and improving waste management with the assistance of Northern Inland Regional Waste Group. Council also undertakes a number of education programs to encourage recycling and reduce the amount of waste going to landfill.

Council continued its kerbside recycling service within the urban area and continues to operate a licenced waste management facility, being the Walcha Waste Depot, along with two rural waste transfer stations to service the small settlements and rural communities of Woolbrook and Nowendoc.

Council also continued its ongoing tree planting program. Attention was given to the replacement of dead and damaged trees.

Investigations are continuing into the feasibility of implementing on land disposal of sewage effluent rather than discharging into the Apsley River. These investigations are in accordance with the Department of Land and

Water Conservation's study into the health of the Apsley River and in liaison with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Council regularly tests sewage effluent to ensure that it complies with Environment Protection Authority standards.

Council is a member of the New England (Noxious Weeds) County Council and through that Organisation, has a commitment to the control and eradication of noxious weeds.

Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

According to the 2016 ABS Census data, a total of 153 people living in Walcha were born overseas. As noted in Council's adopted Strategic Plan, this group represents a very small proportion of our local government area population and all appear to be well integrated into the community. Due to the size and nature of our community, cross cultural awareness training for staff is not considered necessary.

184 people (6% of the LGA's population) are of indigenous origin. Council engaged in a number of programs which provided services to our local Aboriginal community and culturally and linguistically diverse groups. These programs were provided under the auspices of Council's Community Care Program and comprised:

- Aboriginal Group meetings, known as the Wanderers. These meetings are held twice a month and are of a recreational, social and educational nature.
- Medical drives
- Frozen Meals on Wheels
- Health Forums
- Bus to Tamworth on the Last Friday of the Month
- Bust to Armidale every Thursday.

The Office of Local Government is obliged to report to the Ethnic Affairs Commission on local government activity in relation to ethnic affairs. The Department uses the following three key result areas when reporting to the Commission:

- Social justice
- Community harmony
- Economic and Cultural Opportunities

Council is therefore required to identify which of the three key result areas apply for each significant activity or strategy aimed at assisting people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, that have been included in this Annual Report.

- a) Social Justice
 - Meals on Wheels Programme.
 - Social Support Programme.
- b) Community harmony
 - Aboriginal Group Meetings.
- c) Economic & Cultural Opportunities
 - Valuing the presence of these groups as a community resource.



Volunteers Peter Laurie and Tracy Cotton delivering meals being provided by Apsley Riverview

Subsidised Private Works

No such works were carried out during the year.

Council has developed a policy aimed at encouraging employment generating projects to establish in the Walcha local government area. This policy provides for Council to, among other things, carry out subsidised works. Council has not yet had the opportunity to implement this policy.

Contributions and Donations

Section 356 of the *Local Government Act, 1993* provides that Council may, by resolution, contribute money or otherwise grant financial assistance to persons for the purpose of exercising its functions. While the Act also provides that

financial assistance may be granted to persons who act for private gain. In 2020 – 2021 the following contributions were made.

Contributions:	Amount:
Floral tributes & Retirements	6,610
Staff Christmas Party & Service Recognition	2,435
Westpac Rescue Helicopter	5,000
Life Education Van	1,680
Rate Refunds	3,383
Sporting grants to Youth	4,100
NAIDOC Sponsorships	500
Arts North West	4,495
Walcha Support Group Insurance	632
Hall Subsidies	3,500
Other Community Sporting	500
Farmers Market Bags	660
	\$33,495

Council also supports the following organisations by offering rate relief as per the Donations Policy:

- Walcha Youth Club Hall
- Walcha & District Historical Society;
- Walcha Gun Club Inc; and
- Tennis Courts Reserve Trust.

Human Resource Activities

The Council recognises that its staff is its most important asset and is conscious of the need for training and development. During the year a comprehensive training program was undertaken. Training places are offered on a perceived needs basis and on the appropriateness of the training programs available. Training is offered both “in house” and externally and some staff members are currently undertaking full time courses in appropriate disciplines. Council has a Staff Training Policy and Code. As apart of the Integrated Planning and Reporting Regime Council developed a comprehensive Workforce Plan which is available on Council website.

Training opportunities are also offered for Elected Members.

Council meets the cost of all approved training. Training plans have been prepared and Council’s training program is available to the entire workforce.

Several employees are undertaking an ongoing course of study with other staff members attending short courses and seminars etc., as appropriate. Training was provided in such areas as:

- Professional Development.
- Finance and Administration.
- Confined Spaces Training.
- First Aid Training
- Traffic Control Training.
- Pool Operators Training.
- Human Resource Training.
- Work Place Health & Safety Training
- Health & Building.

Council spent a total of \$84,949 on all training activities during the year. The Council has three Committees that deal with human resource issues. These are the Staff Consultative Committee, the General Manager's Performance Committee and the Workplace Health and Safety Committee.

Equal Employment Opportunity

Council has adopted an Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Plan as required by the Local Government Act, 1993. Council has also earlier conducted a survey of staff to ascertain information which will be used in the implementation of the plan:

- Employees of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background.
- Employees of non-English speaking background.
- Female employees.
- Employees with disabilities.

Council has in place a Grievance Policy and a Protected Disclosures Policy and Procedure.

External Bodies Exercising Council Functions

During the year the following external bodies exercised functions on Council's behalf:

- New England (Noxious Weeds) County Council - Noxious Weed control.
- Central Northern Regional Libraries - Library service.
- Mid North Weight of Loads Group.

Interests in Companies

Council does not hold any interest in any companies.

Co-operatives and Joint Ventures

Council is a member of the following organisations:

- NAMOI Unlimited, a group of Councils whose interests lie specifically in matters of Local Government member Councils are Tamworth Regional, Liverpool Plains, Gunnedah, Gwydir, Uralla and Walcha.
- Mid-North Weight of Loads Group, a group of Councils covering parts of the Hunter, the New England and the Mid-North Coast who provide an inspectorial role in relation to overloaded heavy vehicles.
- Local Government NSW, the peak organisation of Local Government in NSW.
- Statewide Insurance, a Statewide Local Government Mutual for liability, building insurance and motor vehicle.
- State Cover Insurance, a Statewide Local Government mutual for workers compensation insurance.

Overseas Visits Funded by Council

There were no overseas visits funded by Council this financial year.

Children's Services

Council provides a number of services that are used by the youth of the area including the library, playing fields, the swimming pool, squash courts, skate board area and playing grounds.



Council helps the local schools by assisting with the transportation of the North West Life Education Van and by paying the entry fees of all students in our local government area into the Van. In addition, Council provides grants to local sporting organisations for junior sport development.

Council operates the Walcha Preschool and also provided an Early Intervention Service for children with learning disabilities. Council makes an annual contribution to pay Niangala Hall and Walcha Anglican Hall hire fees for the families attending the Gubi Gabun Children's Mobile Service early childhood program. 531 people (17% of the LGS's population) are under the age of 15 (2016 Census).

Youth Services

Council's school holiday program continues to entertain and engage the youth of Walcha, with a varying assortment of activities proving to be popular and well attended. COVID 19 closures and restrictions have continued to make it particularly difficult to interact with the youth of Walcha for parts of the year, especially during the lockdown and continued restrictions on gatherings and events. Staff maintain a relationship with the youth of Walcha by organising a wide range of activities with varying themes and methods of delivery. They distribute craft kits, take home movie kits, organise structured challenges (eg lego, cooking, scavenger hunts), host mini-workshops and small group walking excursions. The partnership with Walcha Handmade to provide quality arts based activities was maintained, with a series of physical workshops (including tie dying and photography) as well as organised craft kits to engage and inspire local youth in person and remotely. The Pool Party and Dive In Movie held in January remained popular despite being moved indoors due to the wet weather. There were two youth outdoor movies planned as part of the 'Summer Movies Under the Stars', which were both moved indoors due to wet weather. Bus trips to the larger centres of Armidale and Tamworth were very popular, despite smaller group numbers due to new COVID 19 restrictions. These trips included full day outings to enjoy Ten Pin Bowling, the Cinema, Laser Tag and SportUNE Indoor Rock climbing wall. Staff also organised a series of sports workshops this year in conjunction with local community sports groups and coaches; including golf, tennis, indoor hockey and AFL. Staff were able to connect with a wider cross section of youth in the community by holding craft activities in McHattan Park during the Walcha Farmers Markets over summer.

In addition to school holiday programs, staff also worked with Walcha youth on the Skatepark Paint Project, where the skatepark surface was re-designed and painted with the input and assistance of local young people, in conjunction with the schools and wider community. The NSW Youth Week event this year was a Comedy Workshop presented by a professional stand-up comedian. The whole day workshop engaged a group of local youth in learning stand up comedy, and then performing to a live audience of community and family members. Council wasn't able to sponsor a church run Kids Games this year due to COVID restrictions in place in October. Council funded a Youth Summit held by 'Leadership Academy Australia' at Walcha

Central School, a local mobile playgroup to Walcha and outlying villages and a Healthy Harold visit to the schools each year.

The Walcha Library and Youth designated social media presence was helpful in the promotion and engagement of youth activities, providing important and relevant information via Instagram and Facebook, and a connection to the youth during COVID-19. Social media also provided a means to distribute resources (including study support) and youth specific information from external sources and government youth initiatives.

The Youth Advisory Committee continue to play an integral part in planning and delivering these activities. The participants ideas and priorities are gathered during meetings at the schools, at the Skatepark and through a working group at the library, in order to be integrated into the program.

Tourism Activities

COVID-19 continued to cause disruption to tourism activities during 2020/2021 with the cancellation of the Walcha Mountain Festival and the Walcha Motorcycle Rally 2020.

Planning for both events had commenced, and funding had been received for the Motorcycle Rally. On its cancellation a new way to spend the tourism relating grant needed to be found. The Walcha Slow Tourism campaign was launched, and using this money we commissioned an Armidale based marketing firm with many years' experience in tourism and promotion to create a series of 12 short videos showcasing Walcha and all it has to offer. They have been periodically released to keep our marketing content fresh and inviting. The 'slow tourism' campaign also included; the Walcha promotional truck billboards, supported by local logistics company, Betts Transport who travel interstate between Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne & Adelaide; Walcha Promotional oOh! Media Billboard which has been on display at the Armidale Airport and Moonbi sites on the New England Highway; a cycling campaign of promotional videos and nine (9) mapped routes on Ride with GPS and on our walchansw website; An advert and editorial piece in the Australian Traveller Magazine and their social pages.

Grants that continued into 2020/21 include:

- **\$230,680 Regional Tourism Bushfire Recovery Fund (RTBR)** applied for by Walcha as lead applicant for New England High Country to

establish and promote four Soundtrail projects in National Parks surrounding Tenterfield, Glen Innes, Armidale and Walcha.

- **\$20,000 – Regional Tourism Bushfire Recovery Fund (RTBR)** applied for by Destination Country and Outback (DNSW). Promotion for the 2021 Walcha Motorcycle Rally (allowed to hold for 2021 event).
- **\$65,000 (approx.)** of the \$100,000 **Resilience and Economic Recovery Fund (BCRERF)**

Funds were originally planned for the 2020 Motorcycle Rally but due to its cancellation, they were redirected to fund the Walcha Slow Tourism campaign.

- **\$8,000** from Kevin Anderson MP to be used for the 2021 Motorcycle Rally event.

Access to Services

Each year Council conducts a series of regional meetings throughout the Walcha local government area. These meetings offer residents in the outlying areas an opportunity to meet with the Councillors and Senior Staff and to be informed of the Council's activities and services.

In addition to the Annual report, Council also prepares an annual Ratepayer Information Sheet that is posted with the rate notices.

Access and Equity Activities

Council is responsible for making sure that their facilities and services are appropriate for, and accessible to, everyone in their community. The Council also has a potential advocacy role to help residents to gain access to other required services and resources that may be the responsibility of other levels of government.

Access and Equity activities or strategies are defined as those which benefit both the broad community and/or particular target groups and are aimed at helping councils to:

- promote fairness in the distribution of resources, particularly for those most in need.
- recognise and promote people's rights and improve accountability of decision makers.
- ensure that people fairer access to the economic resources and services essential to meeting their basic needs and improving their quality of life.

- give people better opportunities for genuine participation and consultation about decisions affecting their lives.

To help achieve these objectives, Council has prepared a Disability Inclusion Action Plan. It is available on Council's website: www.walcha.nsw.gov.au and becomes part of Council's Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework, directly tying into the goals listed in the Community Strategic Plan – Walcha 2027.

Rates and Charges Written Off

The following rates and charges were written off during the period 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019:

General Fund	Water Fund	Sewer Fund	Total	Reason
\$0	\$4,802	\$0	\$4,802	Water Leak

National Competition Policy

In accordance with National Competition Policy requirements, Council is required to categorise its business activities as either Category 1 Businesses, which is those business activities that have an annual turnover in excess of \$2m or Category 2 Businesses, those activities that have an annual turnover of less than \$2m per annum.

Council does not have any Category 1 Business Activities. Council has however identified the following of its activities as Category 2 Business Activities:

- The Walcha Water Supply Service.
- The Walcha Sewerage Service.
- The Ready Mix Concrete Business.
- The Private Contract Works Service.

Council has also established a Competitive Neutrality Complaints Handling Mechanism as part of its general complaints handling procedures. This mechanism was publicised at the time that it was implemented.

Council has complied with Competitive Neutrality implementation requirements and has:

- identified its business activities that are subject to the policy.
- established a Competitive Neutrality Complaints Handling Mechanism.
- implemented full cost attribution in those business activities.

- identified that there will be subsidies to Water and Sewerage Service consumers due to the depreciation of the assets of those services being only partially funded.

Council is also required to prepare Special Purpose Financial Statements for its Business Activities and a copy of these accounts is included elsewhere in this Report as Appendix C.

Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (GIPA)

Section 125 of the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 requires the preparation of an Annual Report. This report is attached as Appendix H.

Development

Our goal is for Walcha's distinct and diverse natural and built environment to be protected and enhanced, as well as protecting the productivity of our rural land whilst maintaining the character of Walcha and its villages. Strategies for achieving this include:

- a) Promote sustainable development and protection of our natural resources through the planning system
- b) Provide the framework for improvements in efficiency and liveability of a range of compatible land uses and development types
- c) Manage land contamination through the planning and development control process
- d) Maintain the character of the Walcha LGA through orderly development of the natural and built environment
- e) Ensure that sufficient land is available to meet the demand for appropriate land uses
- f) Prevent agricultural land from being developed in ways that reduce its productivity
- g) Preserve, support and promote the history of Walcha

Council has undertaken the following services to achieve the goals and strategies established in the Community Strategic Plan, *Walcha 2027*

Strategic Land Use planning	Contaminated Lands Project	Development Assessment
Heritage Action Plan	Housing and Land Monitor	Community Participation

Development Assessment

The Walcha Council LGA is a desirable place to work, live and play; Council is supportive and welcoming of developmental growth in accordance with its planning instruments.

Despite the community facing challenges related to the prolonged drought, bushfires, floods and COVID-19; development within the LGA has increased considerably as seen in Figure 1. The 2020-21 financial year saw a substantial rise in the number of development applications determined; at 61, it was almost double that of the numbers in the previous four years. The data outlines a high number of residential developments, with 12 new dwellings (Figure 2), 8 alterations and/or additions to existing dwellings, and 12 new garages / sheds. The total yearly development values are the highest Council has seen since compiling comparative data over the last eight years, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 1
Development Application Number Trends

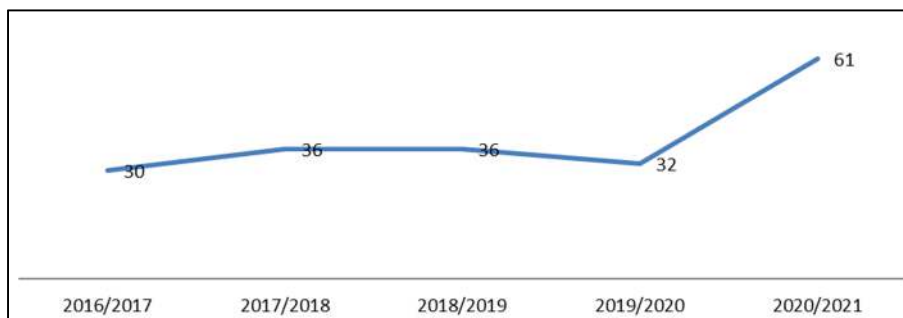


Figure 2
Development Applications – Number of new dwellings

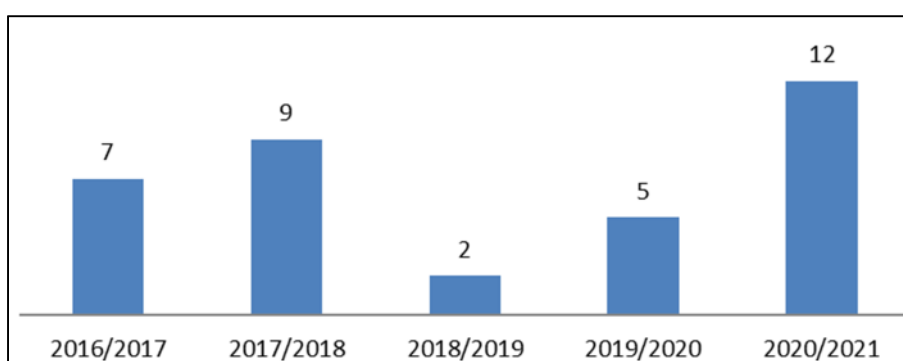
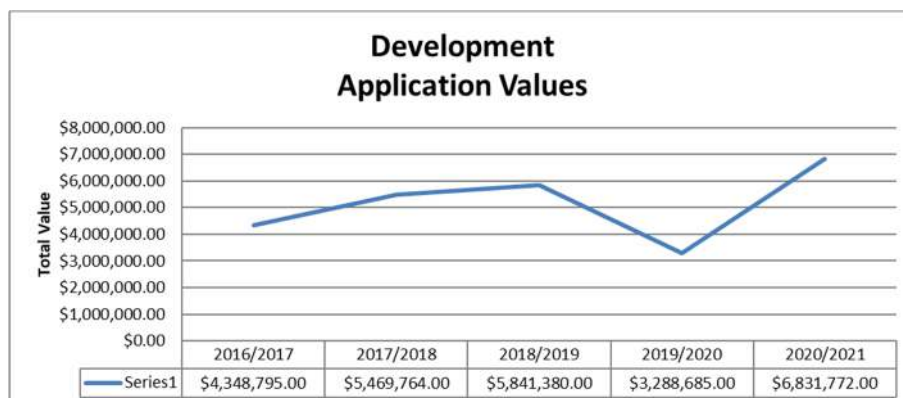
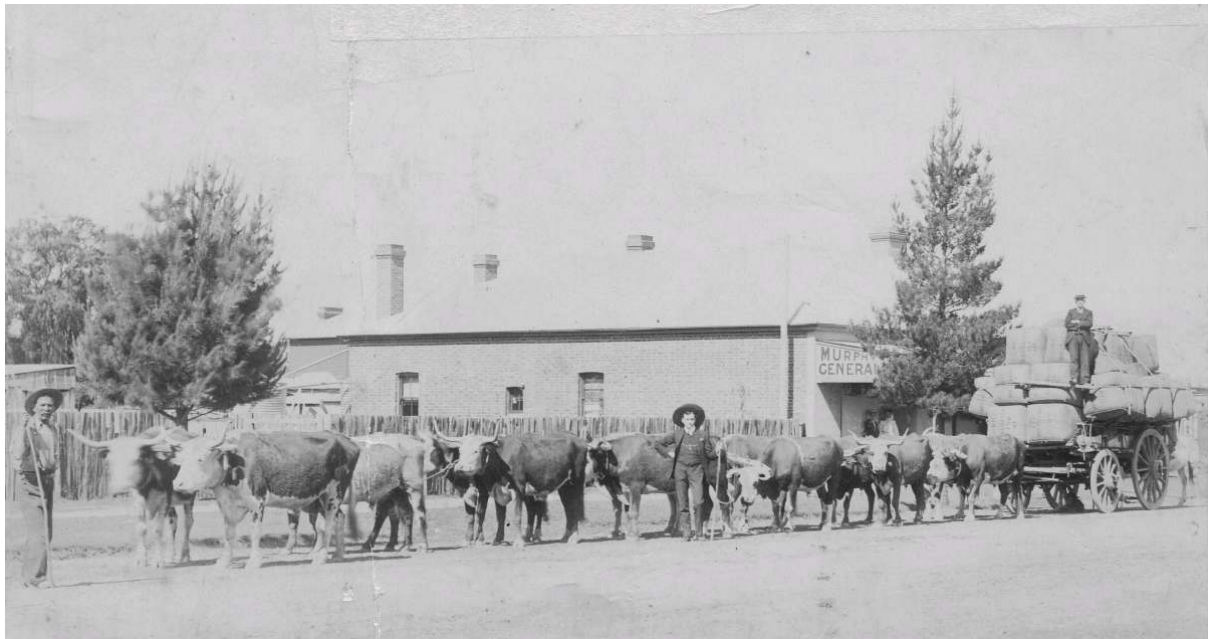


Figure 3
Development Application Value Trends



Heritage

Walcha’s natural, built and story heritage is recognised as a captivating asset in the LGA; Council recently adopted a 10-year Strategic Heritage Action Plan to outline our commitment to the conservation and celebration of the region’s rich heritage, by guiding Council’s heritage work program in relation to the identification, protection, management and promotion of Walcha’s heritage.



Local Strategic Planning Statement

A 20-year land use vision for the Walcha Local Government Area is detailed in our Local Strategic Planning Statement, a plan for a thriving and prosperous Walcha region that outlines a strategy to meet Walcha’s future economic, social and environmental needs.

The vision, to utilise our strategic location at the crossroads of the Oxley Highway and Thunderbolts Way to develop our diverse and productive agricultural activities, support the growth of Walcha Township and connected villages and captivate visitors with our vibrant natural and cultural tourist attractions.

The statement identifies five clear planning priorities to address the planning and development issues of strategic importance as well as support and develop our local identity, values and opportunities. The priorities set actions to deliver the priorities and vision.



Housing and Land Monitor

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment collects data from Council for the New England North West Housing and Land Monitor that provides valuable information for regional planning and an annual review of housing and employment land data to help guide priorities for future service provision and infrastructure investment. The monitor is used to analyse trends in residential dwelling approvals, commencements, housing mix and employment land development.

Contaminated Lands Project

Namoi Unlimited has been funded by the NSW Government to provide training and assistance to planners and compliance officers with Council to regulate contaminated, or potentially contaminated land. As part of Council’s planning and development process, we must consider contamination, specifically when considering and making strategic planning and development decisions.

We are working with the NSW Government and the community to identify lands that could be at risk to human health or cause harm to the environment as a result of contamination.

Community Participation

We recognise community participation in our planning system delivers improved planning results for our community. Our recently adopted Community Participation Plan sets out how and when we engage with our community on the planning functions Council performs; effective community consultation ensures that a proposal has been fully explored and that the community concerns are identified and considered.

Environment

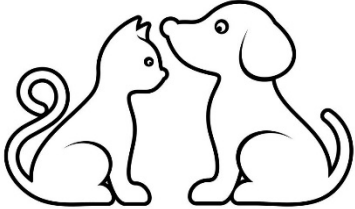
Our goal is for the public health and wellbeing of the community to be protected and enhanced. Strategies for achieving this include:

- a) Ensure that the disposal of liquid waste in rural areas is carried out in a healthy manner without negative environmental impact
- b) Maintain cemeteries in accordance with the community's needs and expectations
- c) Protect and enhance biodiversity, native vegetation, river and soil health
- d) Develop and promote responsible ownership of animals

Council has undertaken the following services to achieve the goals and strategies established in the Community Strategic Plan, *Walcha 2027*.

Environmental Health	Public Health	Ranger Services
Cemetery Management	Public Buildings	Public Amenities

Ranger Services

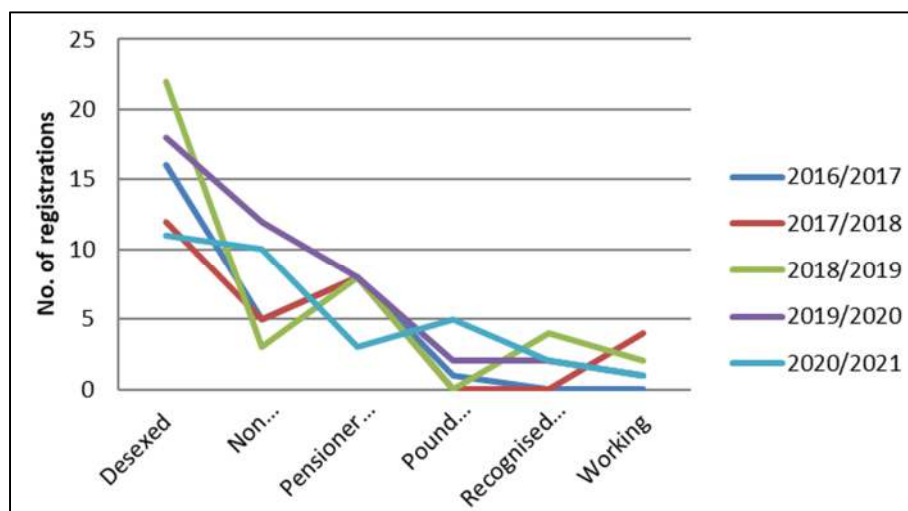
	<p>32 Companion Animals Registered</p>
<p>27 Companion Animals Rehomed</p>	<p>59.4% Companion Animal Desexed Registrations</p>

Council actively enforces the *Companion Animals Act 1998* through the following activities:

- a) Regular patrols of the local government area
- b) Companion Animal Lifetime Registration audits and reminder letters
- c) Dangerous and restricted dog audits and inspections
- d) Attending to complaints and ensuring that companion animals owners adhere to the *NSW Companion Animals Act 1998* and regulations

Council provides one off-leash dog exercise area at John Oxley Sportsground, Darjeeling Road, Walcha. This off-leash area is not to be used while public events are being held.

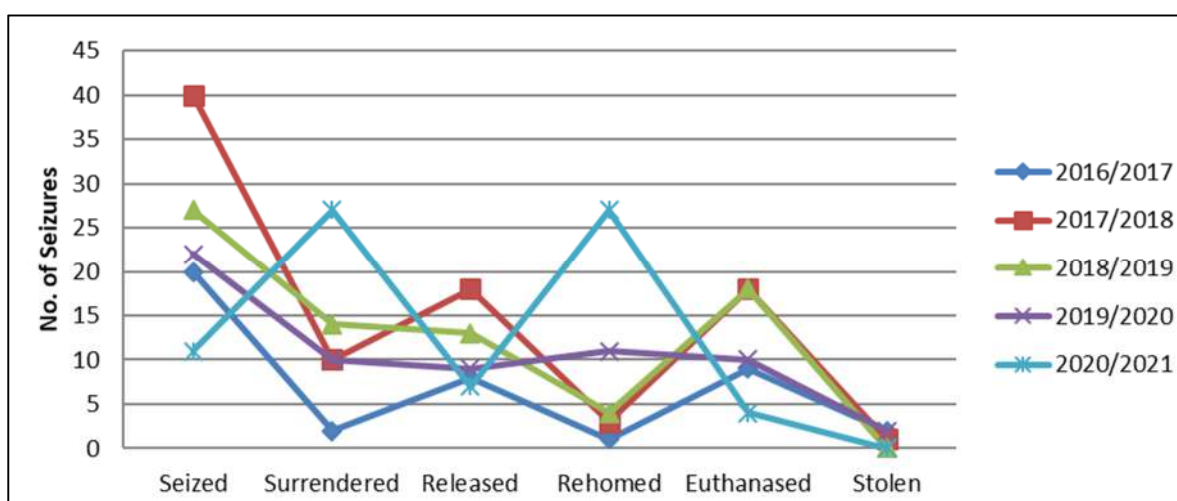
Figure 4
Companion Animal Registration Trends




Over the 2020-21 financial year Council received 7 reports of alleged dog attacks, with 5 attacks being on animals and 4 attacks on people. A dog attack can include any incident where a dog rushes at, attacks, bites, harasses or chases any person or animal (other than vermin), whether or not any injury is caused to the person or animal.

We transfer suitable unclaimed / surrendered animals from its pound to the Animal Welfare League for rehoming.

Figure 5
Companion Animal Pound Trends



Cemetery Management

	<p style="text-align: center;">4 Cemeteries</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">23 Burials</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">14 Reservations</p>


Council has care control and maintenance of Walcha General, Walcha Catholic, Woolbrook and Nowendoc Cemeteries.

Public Buildings & Amenities

<p style="text-align: center;">2 Sportsgrounds</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">6 Public Toilets</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">1 Swimming Pool</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">1 Skatepark</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">4 Playgrounds</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">1 Gym</p>

Walcha's spacious gym was built and opened this year courtesy of a grant from the Stronger Country Communities Fund and features a large equipment area as well as a separate group fitness room looking out over the town swimming pool.

Food Surveillance

	<p>37 Fixed food premises</p>
<p>23 Primary inspections conducted</p>	<p>10 Temporary & Mobile premises</p>

Due to COVID-19 routine monitoring inspections were impacted, some regulated businesses were closed, any available for inspection were undertaken during the reporting period in accordance with NSW Food Authority requirements.