

The Manning Community News

MAY 2021

SHARING COMMUNITY NEWS AND VIEWS

FREE

This paper is being published as a community service to provide readers with factual and independent coverage of news, people and events in our district. If you have a story idea please contact us. PO Box 62, Tinonee, 2430 editor@manningcommunitynews.com



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We are a genuinely independent newspaper. We are not affiliated with any government body/Council nor any political party or religious organisation. We are self funded and supported by occasional personal community donations for which we are very grateful.

SAVE OUR TOWN! SPEAK UP!

This is a once in a century chance to establish a small heritage country town – Wingham - to its near former glory, as a small gem, trading on its heritage and history, by restoring and renovating remaining historic buildings and their setting. And keeping new works in the same mode.

There are many thriving and successful small towns that have achieved this and are now tourist magnets. From Dubbo/Orange/Mudgee/ Jugiong....to Broome.

Broome's saviour was British peer, Lord Alistair McAlpine, (whom I knew) who saw the potential in the dot on the Kimberley coast back in the late 1970s and turned its old pearling sheds and shacks into quaint shops and businesses, set up Sun Pictures open air cinema (still going), the alley area of Chinatown as a huge foodie shopping drawcard. He took the “Broome architecture” of shady verandahs, breezeways, corrugated tin roofs and lattice, sheltered by tropical trees, as



All that remains of the first house in Wingham owned by Henry Flett the founder of Taree

the style of homes and buildings to be built or renovated. He built the elegant landmark Cable Beach Club hotel in the same style. Families like the Duracks, the Paspaleys contributed to the town, building and promoting the Broome heritage of pearling.

Sadly for Wingham, on the mid north coast of NSW, much has been lost, torn down, vandalised or is under appreciated. Beautiful old dairy land and local landscapes are being

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MISSING THIS PAPER?

I have known for a long time that bundles of this paper are being stolen and trashed from outlets and that in some businesses and offices, owners and staff have been threatened if they keep, share or supply copies of The Manning Community News.

May I remind the perpetrator(s), and I know who they are, that I have witness statements of their actions and threats.

Not only are such actions theft, censorship and oppression of Freedom of Information and of the Press, it is also petty, stupid and shows how scared you are of the truth being made public.

Di Morrissey AM.

Editor and publisher The Manning Community News

PS .Come elections in September - **Choose wisely.**

FAITHFUL MORRISON SAYS ONE THING BUT DOES ANOTHER

John Hewson

It is important our politicians have and operate with principles, values and beliefs, but consistency of words and deeds is fundamental if they are to be believed and trusted.

Australians have become wary of politicians who spruik morals, principles and religion but then fail conspicuously to live what they claim to believe.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison has made a couple of speeches in the past month in which he has focused on his faith and beliefs – to a conference of Christian Churches and to the United Israel Appeal Dinner last week – but his declarations on human dignity at those events sit at odds with his own behaviour.

At the United Israel dinner in Sydney he described human dignity as “foundational to our freedom” and “the essence of morality”. He declared that “acting to morally enhance the freedom of others ultimately serves to enhance our own freedom” and that we must protect against “the growing tendency to commodify human beings through identity politics”.

Yet compare this with his scathing attack on Australia Post boss Christine Holgate, his inadequate response to the Brittany Higgins rape allegations and other reports of bad behaviour in parliament, his efforts to take the Brereton report into alleged war crimes in Afghanistan off the radar and delay a formal response to it, and his government’s decision to ban Australians returning from India and threaten them

with jail and fines if they tried to come home.

From the start of his political career, Morrison was happy to benefit to the detriment of others. He lost preselection to Lebanese Christian Michael Towke 82-8 but was later installed as the candidate for the 2007 election after Towke was de-selected following a vicious and defamatory campaign of leaks and smears (in which Morrison is not suggested to have been involved, and all of which has since been disproven). When Towke initially won preselection for Cook, it was considered inappropriate by some within the party that such a prize Liberal seat could be represented by a Lebanese politician only 18 months after the Cronulla race riots and revenge raids.

Morrison claims that “seeing the inherent dignity of all human beings ... makes us more capable of love and compassion, of selflessness and forgiveness,” yet the Coalition government has lost so much of this sentiment in so many areas of public policy.

It resists complete and effective recognition of First Australians in the Constitution, with a voice to Parliament, a treaty, and by eliminating their continuing economic and social disadvantage. It set JobSeeker far below the poverty line and the minimum wage, at a time when 2 million Australians are unemployed or una-

ble to get the work they desire. And it sustains a system that still significantly discriminates against women in terms of opportunity and reward.

It skews tax cuts and benefits heavily in favour of higher income earners, further compounding inequality. It is responsible for intergenerational theft, through an inadequate response to climate change and the build-up of national debt, pushing responsibilities to future generations.

Personally, Morrison has voted against: same sex marriage; increasing Aboriginal land rights; higher aged pensions; more funding for higher education; better gambling restrictions and consumer protections; and improved access to government data. He has also voted in favour of intervention in the Northern Territory and cuts to ABC funding, to mention but a few.

So much of Morrison’s ideal about the value of individuals, as the base of community and the strength of our society, is directly undermined by the politics that his party plays and protects – unfair preselection processes; campaign funding; the undue influence of lobbyists; the lack of truth in political advertising and restraints on false or misleading political conduct; sports and other conspicuous rorts; and the failure to set up a National Integrity and Anti-Corruption Commission.

It is not surprising that Australians so easily lose trust in and feel disenchanted and disenfranchised by our politicians, politics, and government processes when abuses and excesses are seen as more important than delivering good and responsible government, through meeting challenges and solving problems in our national interest.

Morrison also emphasises, very Kennedy-esque, the danger of being focussed on entitlements over responsibilities, yet his government has gone to great lengths to ignore its well-established responsibilities in quarantine, aged care and vaccine acquisition and rollout, blaming the states where possible, and more or less leaving them to carry the can.

Finally, Morrison emphasises his faith, the value of prayer, miracles, and how God has led him to the office of Prime Minister and guides him in his work. This is not to be mocked. But equally, and importantly, God cannot be used as an excuse for inactivity, on key issues. God would expect that we use our talents and opportunities to do the best we can, not so much for ourselves, but for the greater good.

John Hewson is a professor at the Crawford school of public policy, ANU, and a former Liberal opposition leader. First published in The Canberra Times.



TAREE ROTARY BACKING BOYS OF THE FUTURE

Patrick Guthridge is 17 years old, and is School Captain at St. Clare's High School, Taree. His two close friends, WenYuan LimSchneider and Nathan Smith also attend St Clare's and the three of them were supported by Taree Rotary to participate in the National Youth Science Forum.

This is a program for Year 12 students interested in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths).

It is run in January each year, and involves various lectures, tours, and workshops to learn about university, STEM career pathways, and exciting research into various science related fields.

It is also a great opportunity to learn about science communication from various journalists, scientists, and professors across Australia, and say the boys, it is a fantastic time to bond with other like-minded students from all over the country.

Traditionally, the program is a residential camp in Australian National University or University of Queensland, but due to COVID the program was entirely online. This meant a lot of tiring ZOOM meetings, but luckily the three were able to persevere with the circumstances, and agreed that overall it was a very exciting experience and are very grateful to Taree Rotary for their help.

Said Patrick, 'Attending the NYSF was truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience – not only did it fuel my motivation to pursue an engineering-related career and provide a broad view of STEM's applications in the real world, but it was a wonderful opportunity to network with others my own age who have the same passion and excitement for STEM as I do and gave me an insight into what humanity can achieve through the collaborative nature of STEM. The plethora of niche interests brought to the NYSF by individuals from a multitude of diverse backgrounds opened my eyes to the endless possibilities that exist in our ever evolving world, and gave me the courage to pursue my dream of going to university next year to study a Bachelor of Engineering.'

Adds Wen, 'As an extremely curious person I grew up watching *Doctor Who* and science was a natural interest, as I can't resist trying to figure out how something works. I am amazed when a group of scientists take a picture of



Dr Colin Rose, Director Youth Services, Taree Rotary, WenYuan LimSchneider, Patrick Guthridge, Nathan Smith

a black hole or land a rover on Mars! However, more recently I've started to realise the necessity for science to not just be a curiosity, but a way to benefit society - especially with COVID and climate change - and that we need scientists and politicians to work together to help solve these problems to help humanity (and not to just make a profit or put someone on Mars).

Nathan adds, 'I can't honestly give a single event in my life the title of 'creating my interest in science', I have always had an innate desire to expand my knowledge in the scientific fields.'

Patrick also grew up with a love of technology how and why it works, saying, 'Ultimately, I believe that STEM represents humanity's fundamental means to change the world: that it's a unifying force which empowers society as whole to move forward and overcome challenges, yet has equal significance for the discovery of our identities as individuals through connection to our passions. I believe that our experience of the Pandemic exemplifies this: We've not only been able to identify the spread of a potentially lethal virus and develop vaccines to combat it using knowledge of science, but we've connected through technology.'

Wen hopes to study a double degree Bachelor of Engineering/Bachelor of Science at Australian National University. 'I'm not too sure what I want to do career-wise, but one thing I've learnt from the NYSF is that if

you study something you love and are passionate about, you'll be sure to find a job you love!'

Adds Nathan, 'I am continuing to study subjects around science and hope to continue for the rest of my career, with the experience of the forum I believe expanding upon this even more. I hope to pursue a career in Mechanical engineering.'

Patrick continued, 'I'm particularly amazed by the interaction of acoustics and electronics, having spent many hours conducting extensive research into the area, building home-made speakers, and learning about sound engineering.'

I asked these three bright boys what they'd like to see happen or change in the near future.

Wen: I think our area (and our country) needs more renewable energy and infrastructure for electric vehicles and high speed rail. It's embarrassing when governments invest in gas and fossil fuels as opposed to renewables, and instead of encouraging electric vehicles, try to tax them instead (also our trains are just really slow). We need to rethink the way we deal with our rubbish - it is hard to know what you can and can't recycle, our groceries come with way too much packaging (that is neither made from recycled materials or is itself recyclable), and the amount of edible food thrown out by farmers, supermarkets, and consumers is extremely

concerning. Of course this isn't a local community problem, but even if we can make small, habitual changes (like recycling bits of clean aluminium foil by scrunching them up into tennis-ball sized balls, or buying more local produce), we can make a difference and inspire/force those higher up the chains of power to make a difference as well.'

Patrick's pointers are; 'While we are fortunate to have several excellent schools in our area, the Taree Universities Campus is a promising sign for the future, but more consistent government

funding is required to provide students in our region with the best possible education.

With the increased regularity of these devastating events with the onset of climate change, it is vitally important that our council reassess how disasters are better responded to on a local scale.

Climate change is undeniably one of humanity's greatest challenges, so to combat the great challenge of climate change we need to achieve global net zero emissions which will require the contribution of everyone. Australia is in a prime position to become a world leader of climate action, and we can promote this on a local level by investing in renewables and educating the local community about the benefits of leading an environmentally conscious lifestyle.

We need significant investment in renewable energy generation and storage, as well as initiatives to establish carbon-neutrality on a local scale.' And he adds – 'Also, we need some more devoted, expeditious politicians who don't settle for mediocrity.'

The three friends all take similar subjects at school (4 units Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry) and with these shared interests they've become fairly close and competitive friends.

It was heartening to meet them.

DM

“WHY I OPPOSED THE MCC BUDGET!”

At the April Meeting of MidCoast Council, Councillor Peter Epov attempted to express his concerns about Council’s Delivery Program, Operational Plan and the 2021/22 ‘Draft’ Budget and was the only Councillor to vote against the Budget going on public exhibition. Many in the community we were appalled at the treatment towards Councillor Epov in that meeting, so here he puts his case to the public.

“Amidst a torrid of interjections, heckling and frequent interruptions by the Mayor; threats of being ejected from the Chamber, and eventually being forced to apologise for my suggestion that Council may be in breach of Section 403 of the Local Government Act (1993); for failing to update and publish a Long Term Financial Plan, a Plan that has been promised each year in 3 successive Budget documents since 2019, I would like to put my views before our community on the 2021/22 Operational Plan and the Resourcing Strategy which includes the 2021/22 Draft Budget.

MAKING MIDCOAST A BETTER PLACE.

A Council’s Annual Operational Plan and Annual Budget should be time for celebration and for reflection; it should be a time when Council; being both the elected body and the Administration, reaches out to the residents and ratepayers and clearly explain and clearly explain the founding principles for the Budget and how Council intends to spend ratepayers’ hard earned contributions and the public funds granted to the Council for the benefit of the community.

That explanation should be premised on bringing hope and confidence to people that Council is working for them

and is actually focused on the delivery of services and projects that are important and which may enhance their lives.

The Operational Plan and Budget should also provide sufficient information to inspire confidence and instil trust that the Council has planned and prepared well and will actually be able to *deliver* their promised outcomes. This means that the allocated funds within the ‘Draft’ Budget will be spent wisely through a transparent and traceable process with realistic deadlines for the delivery of projects and ser-

vices.

This all entails a process of clarity, accountability and fiscal responsibility but in my view current documents now on public exhibition do not achieve these objectives.

GAME CHANGING

A Council’s Budget can create game-changing opportunities and achieve a great deal of good, for the lives of the residents, merchants, industries, businesses, farmers, and indeed our entire community.

A good Council should be planning for the future with very clear, concise and transparent goals and objectives developed through genuine community engagement. It shouldn’t be running away from responsibility nor waiting until after the next election to come clean on its failures and the very real and serious challenges which lie ahead. Some of which will be financial!

NO CORRELATION BETWEEN THE OPERATIONAL PLAN AND THE BUDGET.

With the exception of a few items there is no direct correlation between the projects in the Operational Plan and the ‘Draft’ Budget. There have been no precise project costings, either line by line presented to Councillors, or by project to the community. This is particularly perplexing when the Water and Sewer Reports are usual-



ly very concise.

It becomes unrealistic to support a ‘Draft’ Budget, let alone to try to explain and indeed justify it to the community when you clearly don’t understand how it has been framed.

This uncertainty is only further

compounded when you can’t point to a system which can with some confidence reliably monitor financial expenditure and the progress of projects.

It essentially becomes a situation tantamount to handing over a blank

cheque for \$280 million.

We can't continue to function in this same old way, year after year, decade after decade.

\$6 MILLION SOFTWARE

Council has spent over \$6 Million for this "you bewt" software program which we were told back in 2017, would deliver all manner of reports and information. After nearly four years it appears it's still not fully functional and we may have been paying for modules that we still can't operate.

'SMART'

For over 40 years businesses throughout the world have been using the 'SMART' process in corporate planning to write Management's Goals and Objectives and to enhance the chances of succeeding with projects, as well as building trust and confidence that the project will be completed as planned. Our Council should be following a similar process with its project planning and reporting to both the elected body and the Community.

'SMART' is an acronym for:

Specific

Measurable

Attainable

Realistic/ Relevant

Time Bound

COUNCIL'S FINANCIAL REPORTING

MidCoast Council operates and reports as four separate business units, three of which are referred to as 'Funds' and the fourth is Mid-Coast Assist, so the community receives reporting for 'The General Fund' – which is the main Council account, 'The Water Fund', 'The Sewer Fund' and MidCoast Assist, and a 'Consolidated' report for all the business units.

Council's reporting contains two key metric indicators, '**Net Operating Results**' and '**Net Operating Results from Operations before Capital Grants**'

Whilst the Administration focuses on '**Net Operating Results**' and particularly the '**Consolidated results**' for all the business units, to illustrate financial stability, in my view the more accurate data for performance and fitness for the future lies in the **Net Operating Results from Operations before Capital Grants**' and particularly for the General Fund, which covers Council's core activities.

I am not of the view that positive results from the other three divisions should veneer the performance of the main account – The General Fund.

Here are some concerning met-

rics from Council's published data:

Net operating result from Council's General Fund Operations (excluding MidCoast Assist)

2017/18	\$15.319 million Surplus
2018/19	\$21.669 million Surplus
2019/20	\$18.356 million Surplus
2020/21	\$32.371million Deficit

(Projected in the December 2020 Quarterly Budget Review Statement)

These figures show a turnaround of some \$50.727 million or 276.35 % between 2019/20 and 2020/21.

The original 2020/21 Budget, provided an Operating Loss 'estimate' of \$12.399 million and in Council's December Quarterly Budget Review Statement that 'estimate' had blown out to \$32.371 million, an increase of \$19.972m or 161.08%.

As a point of interest in the last full operating period (2014/15) of the previous Greater Taree City Council and the Great Lakes Council there was a cumulative surplus for the two Councils of \$22.577 million.

A further and perhaps more truer overview of a Council's performance are the Net Results **when capital grants have been taken out**.

An article published in the 'Tumbarumba Times' last year, entitled '**Councillors must be honest about financial situation**', by Doug Gee, covered the subject of '**Net Operating Results from Operations before capital grants**' very well:

"Competent councillors and staff should well know that counting capital grant funds in the context of ongoing day to day operational finances is like saying your household finances are in great shape because the bank just gave you a big home loan.

The problem is, just like a home loan that can only be spent to buy a home and not on groceries or electricity bills, capital grants can only be used to build things, and do nothing for the operational finances or ongoing financial stability of the council. The only difference is capital grants do not need to be repaid, but they do come with ongoing costs."

Net Operating result from Council's 'General Fund' operations before capital grants

2017/18	\$0.784 million Surplus
2018/19	\$12.900 million Loss
2019/20	\$19.896 million Loss
2020/21	\$55.865 million Deficit

(Projected in December 2020 Quarterly Budget Review Statement)

Total \$88.660m projected Loss

It should be noted that the former GTCC and GLC only had a combined loss of \$3.310 million in 2014/15 in the Net Operating result from Council's 'General Fund' operations before capital grants.

Our December 2020 Quarterly Budget Review Statement was

the last available to Councillors from which to contrast the 'Draft' 2021/22 Budget.

These are some of the key reasons why I do not support a 'Deficit Budget' for the 2021/22 year, and the tables (above) graphically illustrate my concerns that there have been no attempts made for structural reform to the 2021/22 Draft Budget by Councillors.

CENTRAL COAST COUNCIL

We are all aware that the Central Coast Council was driven into administration through maladministration, and whilst I won't be making any comparisons it would be imprudent to ignore the fact that their community (who elected the Councillors) is now bearing the full brunt of the failure by those Councillors to properly oversee the Administration's activities, and they now face a 15% rate increase (as well as cuts to services and other potentially punitive measures).

COUNCIL'S BUDGET PREPARATIONS.

To say that there have been problems with the presentation of Council's last three years previous 'Draft' Budgets may be an understatement, so I am perplexed as to why there has been a rush this year to place Council's Budget on public exhibition in April.

On 21 April (one week before the Council meeting where the 'Draft' Budget was presented) a workshop was held which included time for Budget discussion, so the Budget Financials (some 80 plus detailed pages) were sent to Councillors the night before. This did not provide reasonable time to consider the Budget Financials nor to attempt to correlate them in some meaningful way to the projects within the 2021/22 Operational Plan.

Following this, the Budget Financials and accompanying documents for the Council Meeting were only released to councillors on the afternoon of Friday, 23 April, a weekend and two business days before the Council meeting.

WHY THE HASTE?

In my view this is totally unsatisfactory and insufficient time to properly review all the financial data associated with the Delivery and Operational Plan and the Resourcing Strategy (which includes the 'Draft' Budget) so draw your own conclusions!

There were no accurate nor up-to-date financial reports or any other metrics available to councillors on which we could consider the 'Draft' 2021/22 Budget and the Operational Plan considering the last figures we had were from the December 2020 Quarterly Budget Review Statement. These figures

were not very encouraging, indicating a number of performance issues and since that time we have had the floods which would have had some impact on the Budget and on the timely delivery of projects.

In the absence of updated key metrics it becomes impossible to confidently point to and justify to the community as to how the 'Draft' Budget has been framed and how the money will be spent, particularly when it's a Deficit Budget

If the Administration was determined to place the DPOP documents (including the 'Draft' Budget) on public exhibition in April, then it would have been prudent to bring forward the results of the March Quarter in a Budget Review Statement in April and allow Councillors the opportunity to see the current financial position, how Council was travelling and to help better inform us before we settled on the 'Draft' Budget.

NO LONG TERM FINANCIAL PLAN AGAIN

I cannot over emphasis the significance and relevance of an updated Long Term Financial Plan to Councillors and the Community as a tool to measure financial stability and progress.

Yet again there was no current Long Term Financial Plan, accompanying the Resourcing Strategy. There was an LTFP with the 2017/18 Budget, there was a newer version in 2018/19 but since that time there have been no complete and updated versions, to help Councillors (and the Community) to monitor the Administration's progress.

I have seen documents suggesting we would have an updated Long Term Financial Plan, including advice that a Consultant had been recruited. However, a plan has not surfaced – perhaps after the next Council election???

I suggested in the Council Meeting that yet again Council could be in contravention of Section 403 of the Local Government Act as we did not have an up-to-date Long Term Financial Plan, as required!

This brought down the wrath of the Mayor and several Councillors, one of whom threatened to seek my expulsion from the meeting, if I didn't apologise – it's all recorded, and available on council's website.

(I would suggest anyone wishing to be informed as to how our Council operates should listen and watch a few Council Meetings.)

Paragraph 2 of Section 403 of the Local Government Act 1993 reads: *"The resourcing strategy is to include long-term financial planning, workforce management planning and asset management planning."*

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There is a plethora of documents published by the Office of Local Government stipulating the requirements for, and contents within a Long Term Financial Plan, which is to be set over 10 years and contain multiple / or at least several scenarios.

In the Council Report to the December 2020 Quarterly Budget Review Statement, reference was made to Council facing serious medium term challenges with Depreciation. Perhaps having a Long Term Financial Plan, would have identified the subject earlier and even led to some form of remedial action by the elected Council.

BUDGET DEFICIT

I cannot support a deficit Budget which proposes:

- An overall deficit of \$13 Million.
- A General Fund deficit of \$29 Million before capital items.
- The Budget papers show further projected deficits in **Net Operating Results from Continuing Operations** over the next three years to 2024. So much for being Fit for the Future.

When I tally the **Net Operating Results from Continuing Operations for the four years from 2020 to 2024** in the Budget documents, it comes to a deficit of **\$80 Million!**

Any surpluses from the Water and Sewer Fund should be applied to Water and Sewer and not applied to mitigate losses from the General Fund.

CAPITAL WORKS

I have serious reservations over the deliverability of the proposed Capital Works Program. The Budget figures indicate a \$102 million dollar Capital Works Program. Yet over the past 3 years Council has continually failed to complete the capital works program on time and has had to “re-vote” the residual funds into the following year.

I recall a certain Councillor even advocating that it was a good thing, as we had more money for the next year!

Summary of results

Year	Capital Works Program	Revoted into next year: or not completed at the end of the Financial Year
2017/18	\$58.66 Million	\$49.20 Million
2018/19	\$56 Million	\$46.38 Million
2019/20	\$100 Million	\$30.515 Million
2020/21	\$80 Million	<i>Only \$29 Million was expended to the December QBRS suggesting further re-votes.</i>
2021/22	\$102 Million	

Looking at the Quarterly Budget Review statements for current year (2020/21) to December, out of \$80

million capital works listed only \$29 million had been spent by 30 December. We already appear to be behind. This suggests that there will be more re-votes and carry forwards into next year 2021/22.

This raises the question, how realistic is it to propose a Capital Works program of \$102 Million in 2021/22 when Council has been unable to deliver the designated capital works program in the previous three years? Particularly, as we were already behind this year after the December quarter, and the consequences of the floods are yet to be factored in.

I have little confidence that a \$100 million capital works program in 2021/22 will be achievable.

STAFF COSTS

Year	Amount
2017/18	\$73 Million
2018/19	\$76 Million
2019/20	\$80 Million
2020/21	\$92 Million
2021/22	\$97 Million

Staff Costs have significantly increased since 2017/18. However, in the 2021/22 year there is a \$5 Million increase on 2020/21 but both years have a similar spending envelope. For the current year Council has projected to spend \$280 Million and in the 2021/22 year the projection is for a \$277 Million operating expenditure.

Recently I asked a Question with Notice regarding staff numbers. The response from the General Manager was:

- Full time 710
- Part Time 102
- Casual 159
- Fixed Term 62

A grand total 1033 or a full time equivalent of 831 excluding casuals. He also stated that there were 149 unfilled positions and when filled this would swell the ranks to 1192 or 859 EFT.

At amalgamation the EFT staff was well under 800, so what happened to that premise pedalled by the government that by amalgamat-

of duplication would be removed? The question has to be asked: “How well has this process been managed”, particularly when we have an explosion in staff numbers? What is more worrisome is that the staff costs in 2017/18 were \$73.447 million and now they are estimated to be \$97 million (21/22)! This is unsustainable yet some of my colleagues appear to be oblivious to this fact or are comfortable with it or don’t care.

In replacing and adding staff there are direct and indirect costs. These costs include exit interviews, job description review, position advertising the interview, the lost productivity of the person leaving and the time the replacement staff to settle into the council.

Industry experts have put an average staff replacement cost at about \$20,000 per employee.

If we take into account the 98 new staff reportedly employed in the last six months of last year plus the 149 unfilled positions this comes to a total 247 staff and based on the above calculations it will cost council some \$5.94m in direct and indirect costs for 2020/21.

The industry average for staff turnover is 8%.

\$100 MILLION ROADS PROGRAM

I have placed Questions with Notice in relation to the progress of this Program, and am still awaiting responses.

Borrowings for the \$100 Million road program will only be \$8.625 Million next year. Last year Council deferred the borrowing funds for the program. It’s a four year program based on \$50 Million in grants to be matched (by Council) with \$50 Million in borrowings. So we should be borrowing on average \$12.5 million each year. So if we didn’t borrow the quota amount in 2020/21 and now only \$8.6 million in 2021/22, we must be behind in the \$100 Million Roads Program.

WATER

I do not support the proposed increase annual charge increase of 2% for water availability!

Nor I do not support the two step increase in water usage of 4.76%, as the implications and consequences of this have not been qualified nor quantified, and it’s a punitive measure.

UNREGULATED CHARGES AND DISCRETIONARY FEES

I cannot support an increase of 2.5% in the unregulated charges and discretionary fees until our service levels improve and Council can achieve an acceptable quality level.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Rather disappointingly there has been no obvious attempts at Budget repair nor to addressing structural

reform. Which means these challenges will eventually have to be addressed by the next Council.

BUDGET REPAIR

Ultimately an elected Council will have to address its Financial situation! The longer this takes the less options will remain available and the greater the pain.

- Some of these may include:
- Application for rate increases (*Central Coast Council is applying for a 15% rate increase*).
 - Cutting or reducing services (*some may say this is already happening*).
 - Reductions in staff numbers.
 - Reductions to capital works programs (*roads and bridges*).
 - Council could increase borrowings (*interest rates are historically low, but that bubble will ultimately burst*).
 - Council could increase the administration costs to their business units.
 - Sell off further assets, such as the Woolworths site.

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Sadly, there are many missed opportunities from the proposed Operational Plan and Draft Budget.

Some of the things I don’t see in this Budget are:

- A clear breakdown of Roads Expenditure.
- Expenditure on Economic Development.
- Expenditure on Climate Change & associated projects.
- Reparations to the Bight Cemetery.
- Reference to action on Flood Resilience – *Measures Council will take and pay for*.
- Reference to action on Bush-fire Resilience – *Measures Council will take and pay for*.
- Mention of a Review of Koala Corridors after the bushfires, as many may have migrated to other areas and expanded the corridors.

Like the Federal and State Budgets, a Council Budget is an opportunity to bring hope, confidence and raise the morale of the resident community.

The aim of all the documents placed on public exhibition including the Delivery / Operational Plans and the Draft Budget should be to make it easy for the community to follow, to cross reference and understand the documentation. Many Councils are now doing this.

It is the only way to build respect trust and confidence.”

Councillor Peter Epov.

ing the four councils considerable savings would be triggered through lower staff numbers as a great deal

MY CHILDHOOD WONDERLAND!

The old goods shed at Wingham station was managed by my grandfather, Jack Revitt. As a small girl I walked across the road with a billycan of hot morning tea and Arnotts biscuits for Poppy. Then I'd spend hours playing in the shed which seemed HUGE to me. Sometimes rats had eaten a corner of the cartons of pom poms for the slipper factory which I played with



and used for dressings up. Pythons lived in the rafters to keep the rats down. Milk and cream left here for

Sydney breakfasts on the milk train at night. From stacks of stuffed sweet smelling chaff bags, to the animals in a touring circus came and went via the Goods shed. Remains of its beautiful grey gum wood walls are still on a property around Mt George. Think what this shed could be today.

DM.

MCC GM RE-APPOINTED!

At the MidCoast Council Meeting of 24 March, after only being in the position for 2 years and 9 months, General Manager, Adrian Panuccio, was re-appointed for a five year term commencing from 29 March 2021, with a salary package increase to \$430,000.

Not a bad increase from his starting salary package of \$350,000. One wonders how all the other Council employees must feel when we understand that their salaries are limited to an average increase of 2% per year?

THE VOTE

The vote was 6 to 3 with Councillors Pontin, Fowler, Hutchinson, Smith, Roberts and West voting for re-appointment, whilst Councillors Epov, Bell and Christensen voted against.

The Manning Community News understands from several sources, that Mr Panuccio who was only two and a half years into a four year term, requested a review of his re-appointment back in January (immediately after the move into Masters warehouse), and that Mayor David West triggered the process without consulting Councillors as to whether they wanted to consider an early re-appointment.

NO PERFORMANCE REPORTS

Curiously, there have been no formal reports to Council on the General Manager's Performance for two years, from the General Manager's Performance Review Committee, which consists of Mayor David

West, Cr Claire Pontin and Cr Karen Hutchinson, prior to the re-appointment process.

Cr Peter Epov did not support the re-appointment as he felt it premature.

"I had concerns over the process, and Council was under no obligation to make any such determination until December 2021 or January 2022.

Council has not received any formal reports relating to the GM's performance covering his first two years.

There was insufficient time provided for a proper assessment, nor has there been a full review of the GM's performance over the period that he has held that position.

As a principle, I am opposed to an outgoing Council deliberately re-appointing a General Manager for the next Council, it's just not right, particularly when the incumbent is still under Contract. I also believe that a pre-mature re-appointment will not necessarily help the General Manager and the issue will now only trigger further unwanted controversy."

During the period of administration, following the amalgamation, Administrator, John Turner, appointed Glenn Handford to a five year contract of over \$450,000 per year.

"Under the resolution which was adopted by the six Councillors, the

Mayor was charged by Council with the negotiation and settlement of the financial and other terms of the Contract, and whilst I understand the contract has been signed, to date, Cr West has not informed Councillors of all the terms," said Cr Epov.

The Guidelines for the Appointment & Oversight of the General Managers issued by the Division of Local Government, Department of Premier and Cabinet states:

"An annual increase in the salary package, equivalent to the latest percentage increase in remuneration for senior executive office holders as determined by the Statutory and Other Offices Remuneration Tribunal, is available to the general manager under the Standard Contract on each anniversary of the contract. [This has been around 2% - Ed.]

Discretionary increases to the general manager's total remuneration package under the provisions of the Standard Contract may only occur after a formal review of the general manager's performance has been undertaken by the governing body of council and the governing body of council resolves to grant such a discretionary increase because of better than satisfactory performance. [Did all this happen? - Ed.]

Any discretionary increases should be modest and in line with commu-

nity expectations. All discretionary increases in remuneration, together with the reasons for the increase, must be reported to an open meeting of council." [Hmm - Community expectations? Were the reasons for the so called 'discretionary increase' reported to Council? - Ed]

One wonders how the move to Masters fits in???

The Local Government Act requires that the General Manager's salary package and indeed that of Council's Directors, should be published and be made publicly available.

All Council General Managers, are employed under a 'standard' or 'model' contract produced by the NSW Government, which effectively provides that should a current or incoming Council determine to discontinue with a General Manager then that Council would need to pay the General Manager 38 weeks salary. [We wonder which General Manager drafted that section? - Ed]

It will be interesting to see how an incoming Council deals with this issue and in the event that they should wish to go in a different direction, which Councillors will be held accountable for a payout of \$314,236.77.

Continued from page 1

bulldozed for treeless, soulless, cheek by jowl, cookie cutter houses crammed side by side on small lots. These “estates” only seem to benefit the developers and council. Yes, we need housing, but not like this.

REMEMBERING WINGHAM

For those of us who grew up and remember Wingham and the Manning Valley in our grandparents’ day and who have travelled and seen what’s been done in other towns and cities, some good, some appalling, we can see the potential of Wingham. Sadly our Council does not.

There is, however, a small last gasp of a plan to “beautify” Wingham and a small budget. Council asked for submissions for ideas and we shared a lot of local suggestions in this paper.

Some locals visited the “pop up” centre in Isabella Street to meet Council representatives and share views. Some reported that their views were smashed down instantly by certain aggressive council staff on duty. One woman from council in particular was most unpleasant.

Following this, Council released a press release stating there had been a positive response to *their* suggestions and they were moving forward. It suddenly seemed Council was going through the motions of community consultation but actually had their own agenda with plans in place. They also stated they’d received two written submissions.

Well, I know of at least four lengthy submissions that were sent into Council. What happened to them? This seems to be happening a bit too regularly where council “lose” (and redact large chunks from) submissions.

COUNCIL’S PLAN

When Council released their draft plan and ideas there was disappointment and alarm among many.

Some of the business community are frantic at their town dying and shops closing, so are grabbing any opportunity to bolster the town, with little care or thought about how it could be and what it could become. As are some of the self appointed town carers and promoters also grasping at straws.

They just want to see anything done; A lick of paint, any sort of tree

here and there, a seat or two, rip out anything that requires work, creativity, or maintenance. No thought or planning, or discussion about being clever, creative and cashing in on the uniquely heritage image.

THE STREETScape

However, step one from council did sound good – a line of trees down the centre of the main street.

Anticipating the howls from shopkeepers at not being able to park outside their shops, (bugger the tourist/shoppers/sight-



The dilapidated Stationmaster's Cottage near the railway station which could be a wonderful community asset.



The classic Art Deco style old slipper factory

see-ers and locals), a roof and fixtures and lighting is planned for the main carpark a short walk away.)

POOR TREE CHOICE

Rather than seek advice from one of the world’s top forest experts living locally, the council chose to rely on a consultant pulled in from outside.

Now we learn Council has chosen as “our” tree, the Lilly-Pilly, a mass-produced cultivar of a tree no doubt at a bargain rate from a nursery, a tree we’re told, that is a species found in our famed Wingham Brush. However, the “Weeping Lilly-Pilly” (known by locals as “Ironwood”) only grows along the banks of watercourses and only occurs on the riverine fringe of our Wingham Brush. Its thirsty root system sucks up water at an enormous rate (remember the water main goes down the main street) and has fruit with squishy flesh, 15-20 mm in diameter with a single heavy round seed. It fruits heavily between January-April - to drop on cars, all and sundry, and cover the pavement with marbles to



The space adjacent to the railway station in front of the stationmaster's cottage where the old Goods Shed stood

skid and slip upon. Just what our elderly citizens need! And the Weeping Lilly Pilly is prone to psyllid insect attack, requiring a systemic poison.

Why not use our local Blush Tulip Oak, or Red Cedar trees around town – definitely more adaptable, far less problematic and part of our heritage.

In addition, the council plans to rip out the beautiful flowers, shrubs and plants around the village green, the heart of the town.

The beautiful 70 year-old-plus Flintwood shade tree, planted in the park by the oldtimers which recently the council destroyers cut down thinking it was a weed, (!) started a desperate reshoot to live again. But

it looks like the sprouting stump of this beautiful tree has now been poisoned.

WHY A BRICK WALL

Council plans to replace the graceful greenery around the Village Green with bricks. No offense to our terrific Wingham Brickworks, but.. why? It’s an exposed wall and with no shady trees and will be hot as the devil. And uncomfortable.

Do they really think the oldies are going to sit on a brick bench in the sun, wind and rain? People want shady trees to sit under on comfy seats and benches... to listen to whomever is playing in the old fashioned white bandstand (we wish) or to watch the cricket on the green.

If they’re cutting down the greenery because Council doesn’t want to maintain it (and heaven knows they do a sporadic and sloppy job as it is with verges and cemeteries etc.) surely we could organise a volunteer group to maintain the village green!

We also don’t want ugly and unhealthy plastic based sails and the clutter of toys, sports and active equipment (unused) and metal objects in the park. Nor such as the ill conceived Bedpan Waterfall “decoration”.

LOST HERITAGE

I have written previously of the lost, falling down, abandoned, ne-



Station Masters House 1998

glected and historic places in Wingham. Even as recently as 2011 the Wingham Hotel burned down (why or how has never been established) and charred bits of some of the poles of the Cobb and Co stables attached to the hotel – the last of such stables in NSW. Council decided to cut them all down to the deep distress of the community who mounted a fight to save the stables.

A heritage architect brought from Sydney said the poles were magnificent and perfectly safe, one small bit of maintenance was needed on two of the poles, more for the aesthetics and was all that was required.

But the council sent in the chainsaws at dawn. Tragic.

LIGHT POLES

So reading on... in the latest council “plans” for Wingham we find the description of new light poles. Instead of buying beautiful replica double armed heritage lamp posts (how good on top of the “sewer lid” roundabout at the bottom of Isabella Street would they look?) we are told the new poles will be “multipoles.” Spare me.

The council wording alarmingly indicates a decision has already been made. Is this so? I asked council about the poles but have never received a reply, though my query was “passed on.”

These poles are high tech, so does that mean they need expensive “upgrades” periodically? Multipole is a brand. Check out www.multipole.com.au it also explains how its poles can be used for surveillance and “project an aura of “SMART cities.” And there are pictures of these poles along the likes of Paramatta Road etc.

Meanwhile the City of Sydney has replaced all the lights on the Harbour Bridge with graceful

we have great meat products. While we have several attractive restaurants we need more eateries, tea rooms, shops where tourists like to browse, a classy pub, a winery and vineyard. (Council killed that one a few years back too. Imagine eating outdoors along the riverfront, drinking Wingham Wine, grown right

Turn the Station Master’s cottage into a train museum, stick an historic train carriage outside as a tearoom.

Repair, and if necessary, move Henry Flett’s home, the first house in Wingham which is almost gone but could be rescued and re-built.

We could have an animal rescue centre, not only to heal and save the many injured local wildlife, but to also be an interesting centre to visit and see our local wildlife recover before being released. I know we have Koalas in Care doing a great job, but they need a lot more funding and proper premises as this could be a popular tourist destination.

The riverfront should be rebuilt for locals to enjoy, not jammed for overnight (and in some cases for a month or more) messy campers. The (now flood ravaged) riverfront by the Brush with the old wharf where the boats came up river from Sydney to collect their cargo of local cedar, the red gold, dumping their ballast of sandstone into the river, could be sensitively replaced.

SO...WHAT NOW?

Send us your ideas and suggestions. And please, **urgently** WRITE, CALL, VISIT, make a SUBMISSION quickly to council. Send me a copy or let me know you’ve done so. (And how you were treated.) Then we will have a more accurate accounting of how the community really feels and what you want.

THIS IS OUR LAST CHANCE.

Those who care little about heritage and quaintness and just want to see the usual amenities of sterile chain stores /laundromats / carwashes/ unimaginative eateries and uninspiring units and homes, where innovation, landscaping and creativity is jumped on, should move elsewhere.

Wingham is not alone. The mid north coast is dotted with villages and towns which could all be part of a quaint and attractive tourist trail.

If Covid has taught us anything, it’s made us pause and reflect where we are and how we are living and that speedy, slick, make a quick quid at any cost comes at a cost; The loss of what is meaningful and how we co-exist within our landscape and with each other, respecting our past, seeing where we went wrong and what is really important in life - which can be something as simple as a shady tree, birdsong, sharing local food with family and friends.

And to be brave. To speak up and call out misdemeanours, and worse, when we know about them, and do nothing.

Come September, choose wisely.

Di Morrissey



Wingham Station with Station Masters house on right

charming replicas of the original lamps from when it was built.

WE ARE NOT A CITY

Wingham does NOT want to be a city! We like our niche in the world, the heritage buildings along the street, the Brush, the River, the dairy farm landscapes, local farmers growing gourmet foods, making cheeses etc and of course

there. Maybe a B&B to stay in so no need to drive. Nope, said Council.)

WHY NOT

. . . . approach the owners to turn the classic art deco ex-slipper factory into an art movie and performance space. Re-instate the old Goods Shed as an arts and craft centre or an Indigenous Keeping Place.



The greenery around one section of the village green locals don't want to see stripped out for a brick wall

A MOVE TO THE COUNTRY?

People living in small cities and towns across Australia, away from the big capital cities in which about two-thirds of Australians now live, have been worrying about the future of their communities for the best part of a century – and for most of that time, not without good cause.

But it is just possible that the increasing concentration of the Australian population in capital cities – a trend which has been going in since Federation, if not earlier – may have run its course.

The most recent data on ‘internal migration’ published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics show an unprecedented, and significant, outflow of population from Australia’s big cities to regional centres since March last year. Music to the ears of local councils – if they are prepared!

Most of the movement is from Melbourne – a reaction, almost certainly, to the mis-handling of the pandemic by the authorities in that state, and the over-the-top policing of health restrictions (borne out of a much longer-standing tradition in Victoria of using the police as an arm of the State Revenue Office).

But there has also been a significant acceleration in the long-term outflow of people from Sydney, and a marked slowing in the long-term flow of people to Brisbane.

Obviously, these developments have been prompted by the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. But there’s

a chance that they mark the start of something that may continue after the pandemic has receded.

In particular, people’s experience with the pandemic has shown that people in so-called “white collar” jobs can work effectively, without any loss of ‘productivity’ or the capacity to ‘work in teams’, from their homes, without needing to be at their desks, in their offices provided there is affordable, efficient internet access.

And people doing these jobs have discovered that there are much better things to be doing with the first and last hours of each working day than sitting in their cars as they crawl along clogged freeways, or sniffing the underarms of their fellow passengers on crammed trains, buses and trams – whether that be working, spending time with their families, exercising or just relaxing.

In many cases, these discoveries are likely to become permanent, even after the scourge of Covid-19 has passed. Some workers will, for various reasons, relish the opportunity to return to their offices. And some employers will insist that their staff ‘come back to work’. But many employees will prefer not to: and many employ-

ers will see more flexible working arrangements as a way of reducing costs.

As a result, more people are likely to come to the conclusion – as some already have – that they can ‘escape from the city’ without necessarily having to give up jobs which they enjoy (or jobs on which they rely for their incomes).

Moreover, if someone only needs to be in ‘head office’ for, say, three or four days a month, the prospect of a four-hour drive, or an equivalent train ride – particularly when it might be possible to ‘start out’ at, say, 10 am rather than before dawn – doesn’t seem so daunting as it would if it had to be done five days a week.

And that in turn opens up the possibility that towns from which it simply isn’t possible to commute to a capital city CBD on a regular basis – towns which are, say, four hours rather than two by road or rail from a capital city centre – may nonetheless become more attractive places for people doing “white collar jobs” to live.

Of course there will need to be ‘pull’ factors as well as ‘push’ ones to make this possibility a reality.

In particular, city-based people

and families contemplating moving to smaller and more distant towns will want to be confident that they’re not compromising their kids’ access to educational opportunities, or their own access to health care, by moving away from large population centres. They will want access to attractive and spacious land not eaves rubbing boxes on which they can build houses. And they will expect to find opportunities for recreation and entertainment – not necessarily the same as they might have become used to in big cities, but nonetheless some choices as regards “things to do”. These “things” – food, entertainment, tourist attractions et al could in themselves become business opportunities.

Meeting those expectations will require considered, and concerted, positive responses from all levels of government – federal, state and local.

We shall see!

Saul Eslake

Independent economist, speaker, company director and Vice-Chancellor’s Fellow at the University of Tasmania

WINTER = COLD SORES!

Cold sores are a common condition which can recur repeatedly as the herpes virus “hides” in the nerve cells and can be triggered by factors including cold weather, fever, illness, and fatigue. A tingling sensation in the affected area is often the first sign of an emerging cold sore.

There are four main stages of the cold sore virus.

1. Prodromal stage — when the cold sore virus is activated, people may feel a tingling, burning feeling around the lips or nose.
2. Blister stage — as the virus multiplies, small red swollen areas appear on the skin. These then turn into blisters, which may last for a few days.
3. Ulceration stage — the blisters burst and fluid seeps out. At this stage the virus is very contagious.
4. Crusting stage — the blister dries up and becomes crusty, with the scab usually clearing up within seven days.

While cold sores are usually just

an annoying – and often unsightly – people with some types of immune-suppression are at an additional risk of the sores spreading which may result in severe symptoms which may require special medicine.

Complications that require treatment can include bacterial infections which are at times characterised by redness around the blisters, a fever and pus developing within the blisters. Cold sores can spread to the eyes, fingers or other parts of the body. Seek help if around the eyes.

Wearing sun screens on the face, avoiding stress and getting run down, and looking after your general health are good basic defences. Avoid activities which transmit the virus – especially in the first few days when the blister begins to form which is when it is at its most infec-

tious. Direct contact or via saliva are among the most common ways of transmitting the virus.

Kissing and contact with the blisters should be avoided but also people with cold sores should not share toothbrushes, cups and glasses, cutlery, towels.

Nearly everyone is infected by the virus during childhood but some people may only get one or two attacks while others get cold sores more regularly. Between 25–50 per cent of people develop secondary or recurrent herpes simplex infections after the first infection.

By adulthood, more than 90 per cent of us have anti-bodies which show that they have had a herpes simplex infection at some time during our life.

Most cold sores usually go away

on their own within 7–10 days, however sometimes they can become infected which can cause more serious problems - especially for people with a weakened immune system.

Says National President of the Pharmacy Guild of Australia, Trent Twomey, “Your community pharmacist can advise and help you to deal with cold sores so don’t hesitate to ask them for help at the first sign of a cold sore emerging. With cold sores we have advocated for a long time for better access to medicines and as a result patients can now get some anti-viral medications without having to go the doctor first and for a prescription.”

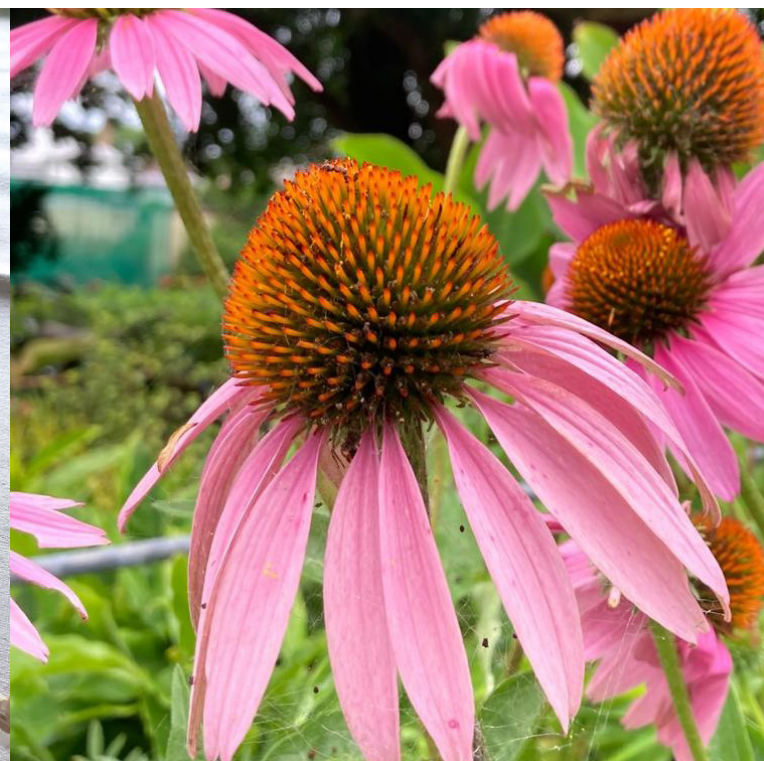
Peter Waterman
For the Pharmaceutical Guild of Australia

HERBS FOR HEALTHY LIVING

Ever wondered why herbs for medicine and healthy living are so popular?



Turmeric, ginger and garlic



Echinacea

Let's explore their health benefits.

When you drink a cup of chamomile tea, to calm your nerves, you are effectively using a form of herbal medicine for health. Herbs contain active constituents that produce actions on the body. For example, chamomile contains bisabolol, which helps reduce tension. While peppermint contains menthol, which is calming to the digestive system. Today herbs are used in various forms, teas, powders, tablets, capsules, tinctures and extracts, to name a few.

WHAT ARE HERBS?

Herbs are plants that are used in cooking, for medicinal purposes, or as perfumes. Culinary herbs are used in the kitchen to enhance the flavour of foods like, coriander, basil, and parsley. Medicinal herbs are used to treat or prevent illness and enhance health. Perfume herbs are aromatic in nature like lavender and rosemary.

BENEFIT OF MEDICINAL HERBS

Herbs can have many therapeutic benefits and have helped many people over millennia. Let's look at some of the more popular herbs used today.

Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*), is a warming herb, great for digestion and nausea. Ginger is easy to grow in your garden and is often used as a tea. Slice some ginger and lemon to make a great tea.

Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*), is a

popular herb today and is a good all-rounder. It is almost easier to tell you what turmeric doesn't do, than to list all the benefits it has. Basically, turmeric is an anti-inflammatory, reducing inflammation in the body, an antioxidant, and is a popular herb used for arthritis. turmeric is often found in Indian cooking.

Echinacea (*Echinacea species*)

The native American Indians were some of the earliest people to use echinacea as a medicinal herb. Echinacea is a great immune stimulant and lymphatic alterative. It is used for infections, as an antibacterial and frequently used to help treat respiratory illnesses.

Ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*).

The Ginkgo tree is a living fossil. Some of the earliest leaf fossils dating 270 million years are Ginkgo leaves. Ginkgo helps support cognitive function and memory recall and maintains healthy blood circulation. It is also an antioxidant.

Garlic (*Allium sativum*), has many wonderful health properties, including heart health and helps support general health and wellbeing.

Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*), commonly known as a culinary



Thyme

herb, has medicinal properties as well. Thymol, is one of the main oils in thyme and has antiseptic expectorant, antimicrobial properties and, is often used in respiratory illness. It can be used as a soothing tea.

HERBAL SAFETY

The old adage, 'just because it's natural, doesn't mean it's safe', applies to herbal medicine. Many herbs have potent therapeutic effects and when taken together or with pharmaceutical preparations can have unwanted effects. If you have any concerns, check with your health professional.

Herbs for health can be easily incorporated into your daily life



Tumeric

and, best of all, they are an effective way of maximising your wellbeing. Many traditional herbs have been scientifically studied and found to be therapeutically beneficial for a range of health conditions. Try to include herbs in your daily routine and reap the health benefits.

To find out more about how herbal medicine may be able to help you, call/email herbalist, Narelle McGinty, to book a free 15-minute consultation. Narelle is available for consultations –

Narelle McGinty

**99d Isabella Street Wingham
NSW 2429**

Visit www.seedsofthyme.com.au for details.

THE SHAOLIN HAND

As her big day approached, an expectant mother informed me she wanted her husband Ron to catch the baby. For me as a birth doctor, this was a first-time request, but I had learned from experience that the mother's wishes were paramount.

No matter how outlandish, anything within the bounds of safety had to be considered. I felt reassured as well because I knew the dad-to-be. We both attended the same men's exercise group called Shaolin - The Way of the Warrior Monk.

My friend Brice, a homeopath, had talked me into joining. It was not the usual thing for a doctor and a homeopath to be friends, but Mullumbimby of the times back then, was a cultural melting pot.

Still, I was a bit wary of a homeopath's advice, I knew the Shaolin teacher, Ed, quite well. He was the hospital physiotherapist. One morning during rounds, he and I were loitering around the nurses' desk, so I asked him about the class.

He looked at me with a sudden intensity. When he decided my enquiry was genuine, he offered to demonstrate the 'Dragon Form'. On the spot, Ed's trim straight body transformed itself into an intricate sinuous form. I don't know how long it went on, but the metamorphosis from man to dragon in that hospital corridor, watched by nurses, was mesmerising.

'I can't do that', I told him, but he encouraged me to come to training anyway. 'Dragon form is pretty advanced,' he reassured. I asked if I could first go and watch.

'This is not a spectator sport. If you want to come, you have to join in.'

'Training,' as it was known, was mainly involved with posture and movement. At a personal level, it introduced me to a whole new concept of being. Ron, the expectant father, was an adept in the group, endowed with a very flexible body. For example, sitting on the floor in a leg-stretch, he could easily curl his hand around the sole of his foot with poise and ease, in contrast to a few of the fifteen who could not

reach our feet and had to reach with a belt.

Happily, the men were mutually supportive rather than competitive, but depending on the master's mood, the time of training could sometimes drag.

It was worth turning up because I knew it was unfolding something useful in my body and mind. If I couldn't manage training on Tuesday evenings, at least I had the good

excuse of being in attendance at someone's homebirth.

Anyway, the time of Ron's family affair was imminent. I should mention that the women of Mullumbimby had been refusing the standard bed and stirrups for a few years already. The customer was always right, especially an expectant mother who could turn into a savage lioness protecting her cub.

So Ron's wife was squatting on

the floor because that's how she wanted to be. He was down on the floor getting ready to catch the baby. It was a crowded narrow space. Mother was in an upright squat, her body supported by the midwife.

Anyone who has birthed a baby knows how wet and slippery an emerging human being can be. It's important not to let the baby slip between your fingers. There could be consequences, such as a torn bleeding umbilical cord or a hard headfirst landing.

Ron was holding out his hands, ready to catch the baby, whose head was rapidly crowning. I knew it could emerge with the next contraction but felt concerned about Ron's hands. His body was tense in anticipation, hands pressed together as though expecting a shower of gold coins, such that none might slip between his fingers. This was not the right way to catch a slithery baby. I was down there right next to him and did not wish to intervene unless essential.

On an impulse, I whispered to Ron, 'Shaolin Hand'. His understanding was instant and I saw his whole body change, shoulders relaxing as did his hands, fingers spread apart, palms curved and facing each other, just like we did at training every Tuesday.

The catch was perfect as the emerging baby's head slipped into that energy ball of the trained expectant hands. Ron continued to gather the fast-emerging body of the little girl, like a seasoned expert. The cord remained intact, pulsing with new life of the little girl, who was delivered up into the waiting arms of her new mother.

However a child sails into the world, I always found it to be a touch miraculous!

**David Miller
Brunswick Heads**

Dr Miller is a retired GP who writes on health and Travel



Small Shaolin warrior monk

DEFAMATION A TWO WAY STREET

Under our current laws of defamation one needs to prove, not just the truth of what one actually says, or writes, but of the ‘imputations’ of what is said or written – and generally, it is the plaintiff who gets to decide what those imputations are. And, under our current defamation laws (due to be updated in July but it is feared will make little difference to the near unwinnable status quo) it is almost impossible to prove the truth of what you say, even if in the public interest or to expose wrong doing. The court requires proof of not just the truth of what you say or write, but of the imputations of what is said or written. And it is the subject, the plaintiff, who gets to decide what those imputations are, unless truth can be proved on the balance of probabilities; A very hard call, rarely won. Vexatious litigants who threaten to sue at the drop of a hat know this. And too often act upon it, often driven by greed rather than concern about their reputation.

Vincent O'Donnell reflects... WHAT'S IN A NAME?

“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose. By any other name would smell as sweet”, so reasoned the love struck Juliet. Didn’t do Juliet much good though, and neither do our increasingly outmoded defamation laws, when it comes to just outcomes rather than legal ones.

Defamation is a legal mechanism to defend, perhaps restore, personal reputations when they have been damaged and soothe the hurt with a monetary salve.

Sometimes that damage is just: revealing a truth that has been wilfully hidden, like the aberrant sexual practices of a minister of religion who otherwise preaches the sanctity of the family. Such revelations have brought down evangelical preachers in the US, grown rich on their public sanctity and private corruption. Gerry Falwell Jr looks set to join the line-up.

Other times, it is unjust: the use of legal action to undermine the credibility of whistle-blowers or prevent public knowledge of personal dealings or beliefs, especially of politicians, that the public has a right to know. The list is long of politicians and business figures who have used defamation laws to avoid legitimate public scrutiny.

Interesting though, researchers at the University of Technology Sydney found that public figures fighting media companies were no longer the main users of defamation laws. Defamation actions between private individuals have grown rapidly.

Between 2013 and 2017, only 21 per cent of plaintiffs were public figures. More than half of defamation actions involved digital publication, and of 189 defamation cases studied, 16 arose from Facebook posts and four from tweets.

Those defamation actions are frequently trivial and used to settle personal feuds about beliefs, opinions, or practices that are, of themselves, legal, but hurtful to one or other party. In 2013, a music teacher from Orange, NSW, was awarded \$105,000 because of a tweet from a

former student made about her. It was the first Twitter case. In 2016, a Queensland man’s comments on his own Facebook page that his ex-wife was a “thieving, lying, money-crazed bitch” cost him \$10,000.

However a settlement in favour of the plaintiff does not necessarily constitute a clear cut case of fault by the defendant.

Sometimes, matters of higher principle are at stake, but defamation is no way to settle them. The three year war between Drs Mourik and von Marburg, in Albury, was about an abortion clinic and Facebook posts about the issues and personalities. It cost Dr Mourik a public apology to Dr von Marburg and \$180,000 in damages. Though settled just before trial, the legal costs were hundreds of thousands more, and the emotional cost higher still.

And in Adelaide, in 2020, barrister Gordon Cheng won a \$750,000 payout against a woman who gave his firm a one-star rating on Google in English and Chinese, along with an extensive negative review. According to evidence given in the South Australian Supreme Court, the woman was never a client.

But things are better than once they were, even if the law of defamation is now, increasingly, in need of huge changes.

THE GOOD OLE’ DAYS

Australia’s defamation laws were once the exclusive domain of the states, and varied widely in legal detail. NSW used to be a great place to prosecute, success was easy to achieve for the plaintiff. Our former Prime Minister Bob Hawke, who was something of a professional defamation plaintiff, named various of his home improvements after the hapless defendant, frequently the media, whose settlements financed the work.

This weighting in favour of the plaintiff may be historic in origin. As political power in NSW shifted in the 19th century from British-born citizenry to ticket-of-leave men and women and their descendants, defamation laws may have been crafted to prevent a person’s family convict

past being given undue prominence.

Victoria, on the other hand, was a great place to defend a defamation, perhaps reflecting the ascendancy of wealth, property and business after the gold rushes.

In 2004, the then Commonwealth attorney-general, Phillip Ruddock, achieved a high point of his career when the state attorneys-general agreed to introduce into state laws Model Defamation Provisions. These achieved great uniformity to defamation laws, nation-wide. But things change. By 2019, the model provisions were wanting.

TODAY’S ISSUES

Social media has a lot to answer for here. Anonymity and ease of posting has created an atmosphere of consequence-free shouting of insults. That has all arrived since 2004, and defamation laws have no accommodation and social media few restraints on defamatory postings.

In turn, ideas and ideals of free speech have come to the fore and restrictive defamation laws are at least as problematic as the rigorous national security law that have been legislated in the past decade.

Here, public figures from politicians to criminals and dodgy developers continue to use defamation laws to suppress debate. In the US, politicians can’t sue for defamation at all. In the UK and Canada, the available legal defences are far stronger and better serve the public interest than here.

Since 2005, court decisions, setting precedents, have undermined defences in the Model Defamation Provisions. The qualified privilege defences, like an honestly held opinion formed for good reasons, have lost ground. And the concept of truth or, more correctly, the way truth may be discovered, has acquired unexpected conditions.

Some judges have demanded that the truth of a published statement be known before publication. Many important stories have been broken but the full truth only established in the consequences of publication. Unfortunately, in Australia, the truth, ab initio, seems the only viable defence,

but is very often difficult to prove to the court’s satisfaction.

And, no matter where the action is taken or defended, money talks, and networks of influence can be deployed to support one side or the other.

THINGS ARE CHANGING (AGAIN)

In 2020, the Council of Attorneys-General agreed to the amendments to the Model Defamation Provision. The major changes include:

1, the introduction of a serious harm threshold to weed out trivial cases;

2, the introduction of a new “public interest” defence based on UK law, as well as a new defence for peer reviewed matters published in academic journals;

3, amendments to the cap on damages to more clearly establish that the cap on non-economic loss sets the upper limit, and that aggravated damages are awarded separately;

4, a new requirement that parties must issue a concerns notice prior to commencing a claim and new opportunities for responding offers to make amends;

5, providing additional clarity to a number of matters in the existing Acts, including the defence of honest opinion.

Missing from this lawyers’ laundry list is any mention of public figures. The “public interest” test does not go far enough. Our public sphere has suffered because public figures have used defamation to stifle debate about their malfeasance. These reforms are a chance to put an end to this legal shelter from political accountability at all levels of **public life from local councils to the highest office in the land.**

However, plans to introduce the amended provisions are on hold. The changes have been derailed by... a defamation case. The previous Commonwealth attorney-general, Christian Porter, who had carriage of the issues, is himself taking defamation action under the old law.

Cui bono, who benefits from these delays? Not justice.

Vincent O'Donnell is a media commentator and analyst

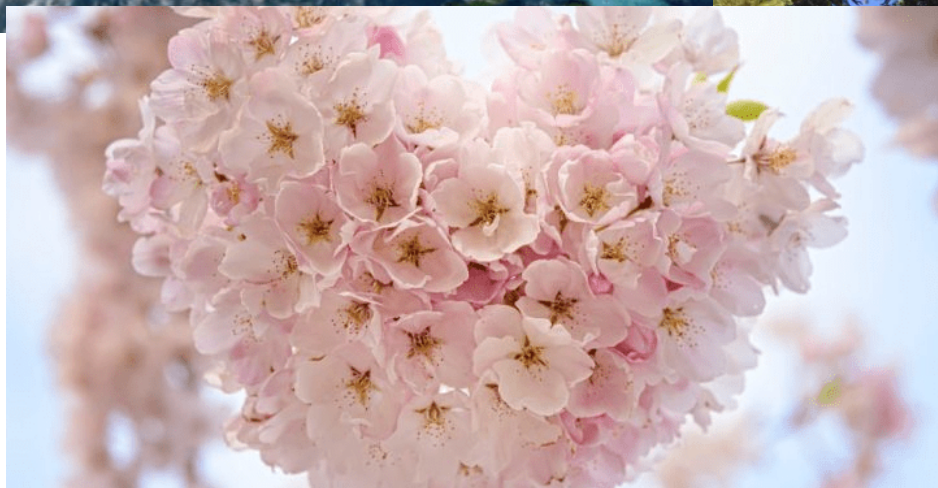
NATURE DOESN'T LIE: HEAT, DEFORESTATION, BLEACHING, DEATH



Category 4 Hurricane Laura (2020) was one of the strongest hurricanes to smash into continental United States. It killed 42 Americans and left a \$19 billion price tag in its wake. Image credit: Andrew Harnik



"General Sherman" is the largest single stemmed tree on the face of the Earth. Almost three thousand years old, The General reaches 275 feet towards heaven's gate. Image credit: Reese Halter



Whenever I see cherry blossoms, I smile. How about you? Image credit: Faye Cornish

Dr Reese Halter

We are currently facing massive areas on land and under the sea that are dead. It's irrefutable and bloody frightening.

Man, the superpredator, is the culprit.

Combusting fossil fuels and tearing down old-growth (native) rainforests to chop up into tiny pellets to be burned as filthy *biomass power* is adding the equivalent heat into the oceans of dropping 10 Hiroshima atomic bombs every second of the year.

THE OCEANS DRIVE EARTH'S CLIMATE.

Trees are very sensitive barometers of heat. In the springtime, deciduous tree buds require a precise amount of heat energy in order to expand and grow flowers to make seeds and leaves to absorb carbon dioxide and store it as wood.

For 1,209 years, the imperial court records in Kyoto, Japan, have been recording the exact date of cherry blossoms, a traditional sign of spring. This year, 2021, was the earliest bloom since the inception of continuous record keeping in 812 AD. It's getting hotter much sooner. The trees don't lie.

In 2020, razing the world's old-growth rainforests surged. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, rumbling bulldozers and wining chainsaws destroyed an area of untouched pri-

meval rainforests more than half the size of the island state of Tasmania, Australia, or, 10.4 million acres. That is a 12 percent increase over 2019's ruination of nature.

The worst losses were incurred in Brazil, three times that of the second highest offender, the Democratic Republic of Congo. This year, 2021, may even be worse. Two million two-hundred thousand acres of exquisite Papua New Guinea rainforests are being swapped, right now, for more monoculture palm oil and rubber plantations, soybeans for livestock feed and the burgeoning \$50 billion wood pellet (biomass power) industry to create more heat and roast whatever remains of Mother Earth.

Climate fires and climate droughts lambasted Australia in 2020, they devoured 42 million acres – a nine-fold increase in tree cover loss. Also in 2020, record areas of climate fires scorched Siberia's old-growth and gutted the heart of the largest remaining tropical rainforest, the Amazon.

Ladies and gentlemen, nature doesn't lie.

Satellite imagery is proof positive that climate fires and climate droughts are worsening rapidly.

The man-made climate crisis is thrashing the oceans. Fossil fuel and wood pellet heat is stoking recurring and more intense marine heatwaves. Those marine heatwaves have turned the richest assembly of oceanic life on coral reefs into ginormous godawful bleach-white boneyards.

A March 2021 Australian Academy of Science report forewarns that at 1.5C (2.7F) degrees of warming, the remaining Great Barrier Reef will shrivel by 70 to 90 percent. (In 2020, Australia's average temperature increased by 1.44C [2.59F]). At 2C (3.6F) degrees, my colleagues predict that just one percent of the reef would survive. Unfrackin' acceptable.

In addition, protecting all the remaining old-growth forests is crucial to slow down these hideous man-made heatwaves. Only one percent of the existing trees on the globe are spellbinding giants. They live in the world's last old-growth rainforests and hold 50 percent of all the stored terrestrial above ground carbon (wood). These beauties are sacrosanct.

Ladies and gentlemen, nature doesn't lie. We cannot live on this planet without breathing, dripping,

mesmerizing old-growth rainforests and all life therein, as well as thriving coral reefs. It's a now or never moment, so become a climate agitator and protestor. It's our only home; we must defend it!



Dr Reese Halter is an award-winning broadcaster, distinguished conservation biologist and author.

Dr Reese Halter's latest book is - *GenZ Emergency*soil compacted and void of life — welcome to the man-driven awful Sixth Mass Extinction where nothing gets out alive.

Contact@BobBrown.org.au



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WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER - GET THE JAB!!

Dr. Simon Holliday

Iwould say 90% people are fearful of being vaccinated. We all see on TV the catastrophic impact of this disease overseas. We hear how UK and US have dropped deaths with vaccinations. 52% UK adults are vaccinated and they just had their first day without a COVID death since mid-2020. We have forgotten the first wave and the fear we had before Xmas when we had potential exposure throughout Forster from the Northern Beaches tourists.

99% of the World is battling death and disease, we would be foolish to presume that we won't see this terrorist virus roar back again. This is more likely as we have such low testing rates and a shambolic vaccine (non-) roll-out to nursing homes and the under 50's.

GPs who offer the vaccine are very community minded as it is bulk-billed with funding based on a 4-minute or less appointment. Many practices deem it non-viable as practices have had to:

- recruit a workforce
- have doctors, nurses and admin staff all do 6 hours training plus updates
- Buy vaccine fridges
- Arrange logistics for 15-30 minute supervised post-vaccination waiting times for every patient
- Draw-up/label vaccines
- Document it all
- Upload details to AIR (Australian Immunisation Register)
- Arrange 12 weeks follow-up shot
- Arrange flu shot after appropriate

delay

- And most of all deal with the fear and apprehension. Everyone believes the vaccine could kill them. Consent processes have to acknowledge the miniscule risks. And all remuneration to GPs assumes the above takes under 5-minutes! People who contract COVID-19 are also 100 times more likely to experience Blood clots (cerebral venous thrombosis) than the general population, a new Oxford University study has found.

The more of us who are vaccinated the safer we will be.

So, go get the jab!

People who contract COVID-19 are 100 times more likely to experience blood clots (CVT)

COVID vaccinations and testing: available at the Taree Respiratory Clinic.

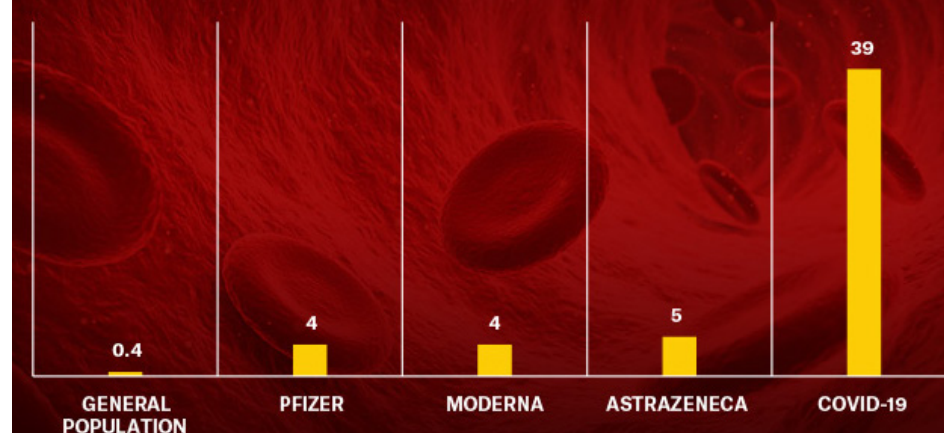
For those aged 50 or more, Astra-Zeneca vaccinations are provided 8.30AM-10.30AM weekdays. The COVID vaccine eligibility checker gives simple steps to book directly with hotdoc.com.au

For those eligible, we COVID test from 11AM to 1PM weekdays. If you or your loved ones have warning signs such as coughing, sore throat or fever or have visited a hot spot, please book via www.hotdoc.com.au

These free services may also be accessed by phoning 6516 2043 from 10.30AM-1PM weekdays. Access is up the Butterworth Lane, not via the adjacent HealthHub entrance.

Help protect yourself, your family and our community by not delaying vaccination and by early testing.

REPORTED CASES OF CVT PER MILLION POPULATION



AFTER THE FLOOD – HOW TO HELP YOUR GARDEN RECOVER



All gardens need water, but what do you do when we get too much? It's a question quite common in the nursery at the moment. Floods and long-standing water can be devastating to a garden and in the very least it's something I think most are familiar with. With recent rain and flooding affecting more than just the garden for some.

How much damage is done will depend on the types of plants, the type of soil they are growing in and whether there have been any contaminants in the flood water.

When plants are subjected to water-logged soils for long periods of time, roots are deprived of essential oxygen. Water fills all of the pore spaces in the soil and roots can begin to suffocate and die.

Native trees are fairly well adapted to temporary deluges. They will generally recover with little observable damage. Large shrubs may also bounce back well. Perennials will need to be observed for a while to see how they fare. Annuals will be the first to show stress, and the least likely to recover.

Vegetables and fruits are more susceptible to periods of water-logged soils. Neither appreciates wet feet for any length of time. Herbs are also resentful of wet feet as many originate in the Mediterranean and thrive in drier climates.

So going back to that question of what to do after the wet has passed; here are a few things you can do to help your garden recover:

DON'T WORK WET SOIL

Working wet soil can do long term damage to the soil structure itself. Soil particles can become compressed, increasing compaction and exacerbating drainage issues in the future. This damage is not easily or quickly repaired.

Allow the soil to dry out for several weeks. Push a trowel into the soil and wiggle it back and forth. If visible water is in the hole, or if the soil at the sides of the trowel looks glossy, wait a few more days.

When you do start working, use hand tools such as a spading fork. Using a rotary hoe at this stage has more risk of compaction than lightly cultivating with a fork. If you must till, save it for drier days ahead.

DON'T RUSH TO REPLANT

Soil biology is damaged when soils are water-logged for long periods of time. Soil microbes that require oxygen to live may die off and those that survive without oxy-



gen may flourish. These anaerobic microbes cause soggy soil to have that foul, sour odour.

This imbalance affects the availability of nutrients for plant use. The soil food web needs a chance to recover. This can happen relatively quickly if the soil was healthy before the storm. If sufficient organic matter, nutrients and minerals are present, beneficial soil biology will re-establish itself once oxygen is available again.

If you must replant quickly in the vegetable garden, support the soil biology with added compost. Many seeds will have a tendency to rot in soggy soils. Even though you want to re-establish your veggies, you should wait until a ball of soil can be squeezed in your hand and no water drops can be wrung out. Like a damp sponge, moist but not wet.

DON'T RUSH TO PRUNE

Stress from water-logged soil may cause some leaves on fruit trees and herbs to yellow and drop off, but the branches are not necessarily dead. New leaf buds will begin to grow in

a few days. Wait until you are sure there is die-back before you prune.

Clean up the fallen leaves and any foliage that is rotting. They can harbor harmful fungi and bacteria that could affect plants.

REPLACE NUTRIENTS

Heavy rainfall can leach nutrients out of the soil. A light fertilization will replace those nutrients. Don't overdo it. It is better to fertilize lightly several times than to push plants that are recovering from stress. Foliar feeding with seaweed extract can quickly boost needed minerals to reduce plant stress.

BE PREPARED TO DEAL WITH PESTS AND DISEASE

Water stress weakens plants. Weakened plants are susceptible to attacks. Fungal diseases are common after periods of heavy rain. Pull mulches back from the base of fruit trees, herbs, and vegetables until it dries out. This will decrease the opportunity of fungal disease spores to form and splash on leaves. It also helps the soil dry out faster.

MAKE AN ACTION PLAN

One of the best things you can do after a heavy rain is to assess your landscape. There is no better time to identify problem areas and form a plan to prevent future issues.

Get a clipboard and a camera or your phone. Walk the garden making notes and taking pictures of places where water stood for long periods of time. Use this information to help you make future decisions such as raising beds, improving soil texture, and making future plant selections.

Make a list of plants that seem more sensitive to wet soils. If you have to replace plants, you may want to look for something better adapted to the possibility that it will happen again.

However like always if you're stuck or would like further advice, come down and see us at Wingham Nursery and we'll get you growing on the right track. Stay safe.

Caitlin
Wingham Nursery & Florist
02 65534570

Find us on Facebook

TAKE CARE!

If you are considering a dip in the Karuah River - Look out! I'm receiving reports of mean tempered giants rumbling through the mangroves in the dark of night.

They have big hard shell and beady eyes on a stick with two powerful claws that could snap a broom handle. They're scary monsters that feed on bivalve gastropods including mussels, pipis, fingers and toes.

They answer to many names - muddie, punga, black and mangrove crab. These thumpers, which could be mistaken for a turtle, are stomping through the muddy shallows right through the western harbour. From Soldiers Point west to the upper reaches of Tilligerry Creek and the Karuah

River, these wild crustaceans are out of control.

They've also been sighted in North Arm Cove, Swan Bay and Fame Cove. These crabs can be caught with a trap set among the mangroves. Check out the NSW Fisheries Hand Book for all the regulations.

Your real trouble starts when you lift the trap to find that you have caught one! How to get it out? How to encourage the outraged beast to crawl into a cooking pot. The best tip is to lower the crab into a freezer then, after 15 minutes, they are easier to handle.

Fishing writer, author and radio presenter John "Stinker" Clarke can be heard weekly, throughout NSW, on popular ABC Regional Radio fishing program "The Big Fish". Check him out on www.stinker.com.au or send an email to editor@manningcommunitynews.com with your information and questions.



REAL KULTCHA

It is the best of times - it is the worst of times!

I've got to ask - how's your team going at the moment? Mine are playing but the less said about how they're playing and where they sit on their respective ladders would be appreciated. In short, they're providing some competition but in general they appear to be little more than smallish speed bumps on other team's run to the finals! A case in point.

I watched The Panthers play The Knights last evening and though I was sitting in my lounge chair some 350 kms away from the match, it seemed like I felt every hit! Have the players gotten bigger, has the game gotten faster or has the game become more brutal? Or maybe I've just gotten older, softer and generally become a bit of a nancy?

Down south things are not much better for my team St Kilda. They started the year - or to be truthful, the media said - with a lot of promise but the first bounce sorted them out quick smart. It would be fair to say if the whole team had gone down with COVID they'd probably be better placed than they are now. Still (and I can't wait to front the local Tiger fanatic) Richmond have suffered a couple of losses to date so his fairy story regarding their chances this year will be worth hearing. I'll pass it on if any of it is printable.

As I've promised before, I haven't watched any Rugby and it's little wonder. The game has gone to the dogs! BC (Before COVID) Rugby in Oz was under the hammer and the governing body decided that as we were pathetic, we had to drop a team. There was much navel gazing as each team at the time pointed to somebody else as the team to go. Finally the decision was made, The Western Force (based in Perth) got the chop and all the others breathed a sigh. Then COVID arrived, teams from New Zealand, South Africa, South America and Japan couldn't travel so a local comp was organised but there was only four teams so, cap in hand, the ARU went to Perth and begged them (pretty please) to come back. They did and haven't done all that bad.

If a team was to be culled right now however, The NSW Waratahs would be odds on to cop the axe as they're running 5th and can't go any lower because there are only five teams in the comp! The Wallamba Bulls might get a call-up yet! I'll keep you posted.

But all is not lost. The Child Bride and I have taken the plunge and signed up to pay TV. And what's just started in the Good Old Hew Hess of Hay - Major League Baseball, that's what. For those of you who think the world of sport begins and ends with

your team in the AFL (Oz Rules), ARL (Rugby League), ASL (Soccer), NBL (Basketball) or (for heaven's sake) ARU (Rugby) have we got news for you! Yes, the 2021 Baseball season has just begun and while not all the games are being shown there are enough to satisfy this old base stealer. I gained my first representative cap playing baseball and my first International cap in Singapore in 1983 playing (a related game) Slow Pitch Softball (and I have the trophy to prove it).

So, for all you sad and already disillusioned sports fans, look around. Alright, to begin with you won't understand the rules but don't despair, you're not going to be the first fan to be confused: is there any real reason why a Rugby League referee gives another six tackles; when is a player really caught with the ball in Oz Rules; why is it that a line judge is always blind when a through pass to an obviously off side player in Soccer is never called; does anybody know what really constitutes a foul in Basketball; and have you ever understood why a Rugby referee ever blows their whistle? See, you're even confused with sports you've watched all your life!

I'll grant you there will be some technicalities you might find hard to fathom and the dribblers (commentators, if you like) are the same sports

and the world over (chatterboxes with access to records and minutia that will drive you crazy) but stick with it, you'll get to understand in time. If you don't have pay TV might I suggest you drop over to Channel 34 (NITV). There you can watch Gaelic Football (and you thought Rugby was confusing) or a range of other sports that could include baseball and both men's and women's softball. Go on, what've you got to lose?

I don't fully understand what happened but this week has seen the creation and demise of a new soccer competition in Europe. There's an old saying that each of us is destined to have 15 minutes of fame in our lifetime but this new Super League (or whatever it was called) didn't even get that! There were billions of dollars supposedly involved and the foreign owners of several soccer teams in the UK signed up without checking if their fans might want it or like it! They didn't. Very quickly those owners were abused (Boris even had a go at them in Parliament) and they backtracked so fast they've probably all got whiplash injuries. The comp has been kicked to the gutter. It's nice to see fans still do have a place in sport.

Talk at you next month,
The Hillside Critic

A YEAR OF SIMPLE FAMILY FOOD

Published by PLUM Rrp \$39.99

BRAISED SHORT RIBS

Secondary cuts of meat, such as ribs, are not only more affordable but they have so much flavour. Yes, they do usually take longer to cook and often require a little more care than a prime cut, but it is so worth it. That said, these braised short ribs require very little active cooking time, you just leave them to simmer away on the stove. Because the ribs are rather rich, I like to pair them with a simple cucumber salad as a way to freshen up the meal. If you're making this dish in the depths of winter, and cucumbers aren't around, you could substitute some sliced wombok.

The beef is also delicious stuffed into bao buns, which I keep in the freezer for steaming at short notice.

SERVES 4

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1.2 kg beef short ribs
sea salt
1 French shallot, chopped
4 garlic cloves, bruised
3 cm piece of ginger, sliced
250 ml (1 cup) saké
500 ml (2 cups) beef or chicken stock
100 ml soy sauce
100 ml mirin
100 ml rice wine vinegar
2 tablespoons brown sugar
1 star anise
steamed rice, to serve

QUICK CUCUMBER SALAD

1 Lebanese cucumber, roughly chopped
2 spring onions, sliced on the diagonal
1 tablespoon toasted sesame seeds
2 tablespoons sesame oil
1 tablespoon rice wine vinegar
sea salt

Heat the olive oil in a large heavy-based saucepan or cast-iron pot with a lid over a high heat. Season the ribs with a generous pinch of salt, then sear on all sides until golden. Remove the ribs and drain all but 1 tablespoon of oil from the pan.

Fry the shallot, garlic and ginger for 3 minutes until coloured, then pour in the saké and allow to simmer for 2 minutes. Return the ribs to the pan, along with the remaining ingredients (except for the rice), then bring to a simmer and cook, covered, over a low heat for 3 hours or until the meat is falling off the bone.

Meanwhile, for the salad, combine the cucumber, spring onion and sesame seeds in a small bowl. Whisk together the sesame oil, vinegar and a large pinch of salt in another small bowl and pour over the salad. Stir to coat and leave to sit for a few minutes before serving.

Remove the beef ribs from the pan and transfer to a serving bowl. Strain the sauce into a small saucepan, returning the aromatics to the beef, and simmer the sauce over a medium heat for 3–4 minutes to thicken slightly. Pour the sauce over the beef and serve with steamed rice and the cucumber salad.





BOOK REVIEW

A MILLION THINGS

Emily Spurr

Text Publishing Rrp \$39.99

One of the hardest things to do well in writing fiction is to tell the little stories. Grand arcs set their own direction: great figures in history shove aside the furniture and fill the room. But to hold the story of an unheralded life in your hands, and to give it dignity and urgency – now *that's* a skill.

Emily Spurr has done that and more in her stunning debut, *A Million Things*. Full disclosure: we share a publisher and I've blurbed the back cover. I did so not out of an obligation, but because this is how I love my storytelling to be.

Spurr's gritty little hero, Rae, is a ten-year-old who lives alone. Well, not *quite* alone, but to say more would be a spoiler. I can tell you that she has a faithful hound called Splinter, and a friend (initially a frenemy) next door, an old lady named Lettie. Both Rae and Lettie are at odds with the world, for differing reasons. Lettie is a hoarder: Rae has a secret she cannot possibly share with anyone. The delicate

interplay of their loyalties to each other, and the unreachable parts of their lives, is what makes this such a fascinating character study. That, and the frequently hilarious, poignant and ingenious ways they connive with each other to get through the day.

Rae's off-the-page mother looms large here too, and for me she is an emblem of home, of all the unspoken things that give comfort and are more fragile than we think. The language is sharp and unadorned but it carries a significant emotional punch. Lettie and Rae don't so much talk as spar with one another, throwing constant jabs that verge on offence and conceal affection – "kiddo" and "old goat-o".

The elaborate lies these two unlikely partners have cooked up to protect each other are slowly compounding, and the reader knows a reckoning is due. That moment is skilfully handled, and it resonates long after the final page.

Jock Serong

Author of "The Burning Shore"



CRACKENBACK

A novel by Lee Christine

Allen & Unwin \$29.99

Reviewed by Jamie Lewis

a race against time make this story a gripping read from the start.

While preparing her isolated ski lodge for the upcoming snow season, single mother Eva Bell is brought face to face with her past when intruder Jack Walker bursts into her lodge. The desire to protect her toddler, Poppy, drives her to dig deep into her reserves of courage, trust and self-preservation.

Parallel to this story, Detective Sergeant Pierce Ryder of the Sydney Homicide (yes the same detective from Christine's previous Snowy Mountains thriller *Charlotte Pass*) is tracking wanted fugitive Gavin Hutton. When Pierce and his team uncover clues that Hutton is hiding in the Snowy Mountains, the two central storylines of this novel entwine. A battle of wits, survival and intuition unfold.

Lee Christine cleverly uses parallel narratives and flashbacks to weave a story that propels itself and the reader into a tension-charged world. She strategically keeps us a few steps ahead of the police, creating a palpable tension as the law struggle to keep up with the ever-evasive Gavin Hutton.

Christine's understanding of Australia's Snowy Mountains creates a chilling setting of isolation, where the vastness of the landscape is paralleled to the isolation of Eva's deserted ski lodge. The use

of weather and landscape skilfully creates a source of tension by physically cutting characters off from help and obscuring vision at crucial moments.

The characters are believable and engaging, and even the motives behind serial killer Gavin Hutton are explored to create empathy. The initially intimidating Jack Walker develops into a stoic yet flawed character who delivers a beautiful emotional core around which the entire story revolves. Romantic tension ripples through the chapters, adding resonance and empathy while never overpowering the characters' motives.

Crackenback is a strong, multi-layered work of crime fiction with good lashings of Australian wit and enough tension to cause an emotional avalanche. Christine's real genius is keeping the reader guessing as to the motives of the killer and why he is so interested in Eva, a woman he's never met. If you like a compelling story, characters you can grow to love, and seeing a unique part of Australia painted in an amazing light, this book is most definitely worth a read.

Jamie Lewis is a content maker, storyteller and marketer based in Newcastle, Australia.

Australians love the great outdoors, so it stands to reason that our serial killers would too. Lee Christine's *Crackenback*, set in Australia's Snowy Mountains, is the perfect backdrop for a white-knuckle thriller, where isolation and entrapment are played out against an enchanting and unforgiving landscape. Intrigue, deception, romance and



BOOK REVIEW

TOXIC: THE ROTTING UNDERBELLY OF THE TASMANIAN SALMON INDUSTRY

Richard Flanagan
Penguin Books
RRP \$24.99

Jack* is a small-scale commercial fisherman in Tasmania's wild northwest, where he plies the waters mainly in the lee of the Hunter Island Group, partially protected from the ravages of the wild Southern Ocean.

TOXIC



The Rotting Underbelly of the
Tasmanian Salmon Industry

RICHARD FLANAGAN

Though the massive Atlantic salmon feedlots that make up Australia's largest fishery are hundreds of sea miles away, primarily in the southeast of the state, that does not mean

Jack has been protected from the impact of the salmon industry. Until recently, seals that became a nuisance by returning again and again for a free feed around the southern feedlots were

captured, loaded on to trucks, shipped up to the northwest and released. Now, where seals were once rare, they breed on coastal rocks and islands and gorge in fragile nurseries where fish and squid abound.

The trucking of seals and dumping in the northwest caused outrage amongst fishers and animal activists alike, so Big Salmon changed its ways. Now they fire pellet-filled 'beanbags' from shotguns at the seals or detonate explosive charges underwater to deter the 'pests', which are, in fact, a protected species. The impact of these detonations on the senses of seals and other marine life is unknown.

Battling seas, seals, the impacts of COVID-19 and unpredictable trade wars with China should be enough to keep Jack occupied. But he has a greater worry. The giant New Zealand-based company, Sea Lord, last year bought the smallest of the three Tasmanian Atlantic salmon companies, Petuna. Petuna is now on the verge of gaining approval to install its own massive floating feedlots in the lee of the Hunter Island Group – Jack's fishing grounds. The little historic town of Stanley, the gem of the northwest, is set to become the hub of the industry with 24-hour truck movements, processing plants, promoted to locals as a job-creating godsend. More on that later.

Of Richard Flanagan's literary journalism in *Toxic: The Rotting Underbelly of the Tasmanian Salmon Industry*, Jack says: 'Can we make him the patron saint of [the movement to halt the industry's expansion]?'

The acclaimed author and his publisher, Penguin Random House, dropped *Toxic* like a bomb on unsuspecting Tasmanians and salmon

industry and into the midst of an election campaign in which Liberal and Labor candidates studiously avoided the issue. Not one major party candidate would discuss plans to transform the \$800-million-a-year business into a \$2-billion behemoth in less than a decade, with the unknown impact that will have on coastal marine life and communities.

This brings us to the opening words of *Toxic* that surely only Richard Flanagan would craft: '*At the beginning its sea was rich and wondrous. We'd snorkel and fish and swim and beachcomb. Marvelling.*'

By the end of page five, the salmon feedlots have arrived and things are becoming ominous: '*We didn't like the salmon farm, but we felt compelled to accept it in a live and let live spirit. While we let Tassal live, things began to die.*'

(Tassal is the largest of the three Atlantic salmon companies)

Flanagan tells a dark story anchored to his beloved shack on the beachfront on Bruny Island, a Tasmanian treasure. Here his elegant, much-awarded novels were crafted in deep tranquility for a quarter century before the noise of Tassal's feedlots, generators, air pumps and vessels, huge and small, drove him away. The irony of *Toxic* is that Bruny Island lies at the centre of Flanagan's tale but he was unable to write it there.

By page eight, the despair is palpable as he watches the lifeblood of the D'Entrecasteaux Channel seep away species by species; penguins, dolphins, maireener shells from which Truganini and her people had made necklaces: '*We didn't speak when the seahorses disappeared. When the weedy seadragons disappeared. When the striped cowfish were no more. When the seagrass started*

vanishing. We did talk two years ago about how the flathead were gone, but then we stopped, because it was too sad and everyone knew why they were gone. And I felt so ashamed.'

The shame is the shame anyone might experience having watched a crime committed and done nothing – in this case the pillaging of public waterways by a business that describes itself as 'fish farming' but in reality is more closely aligned to egg production by battery hens.

From here-on in, the rotting underbelly of the industry, of its political and bureaucratic collaborators is explored with a plot that is as absorbing as any fiction. There is a story arc that takes the reader through the heart of an industry that tramples on the citizens and scientists who stand in its way; uncovers the compliant politicians and bureaucrats who have allowed the salmon companies to set the rules; dives into the international depredations of salmon feed companies that source their fish meal from nations that can ill-afford to lose their fish stocks and from soy growers who, like as not, have cleared away Amazonian jungle.

Writes Flanagan of the chicken feathers, dyes, antibiotics and ethoxyquin (a stabiliser derived from petrochemicals developed as a pesticide): '... it's easier to find out what you're feeding your dog than what you're feeding yourself when you eat Tasmanian salmon.'

Toxic has 195 pages and 270 footnotes. It's serious journalism, albeit campaigning journalism, that cannot be easily dismantled and cannot be dismissed. For any reader, for any consumer, for the parent who does the family shopping, for anyone who cares about what they consume, *Toxic* is not just an education but a surprisingly 'good read'.

The silence of the salmon companies when

Peter George with debris washed ashore from salmon farms

the book was launched may well have been the product of shock. *Toxic* was published in great secrecy, without pre-publicity. The Salmonid Growers' Association – in reality, a lobbying outfit for the three companies, Tassal, Huon Aquaculture and Petuna – fired off its best shot: 'Richard Flanagan is primarily celebrated for his works of fiction.' Flanagan has produced noted works of journalism over the years but the truths he tells of the salmon industry are indeed stranger than fiction.

While *Toxic* takes apart the Atlantic salmon industry scale-by-scale, it also offers hope – an escape clause that offers the industry salvation from inevitable collapse as waters warm, citizens rebel. It even offers hope for the jobs – no more than

the corrupted processes that have allowed the industry to flourish have been explored in excoriating detail; Hobart's drinking water catchment polluted by nutrient outflow from flow-through salmon hatcheries; failure to penalise companies when overstocking led to more than a million fish deaths and major damage to World Heritage-listed Macquarie Harbour; a salmon review panel that simply dismissed the advice of its two most noted environmental consultants.

Only then does Flanagan point to the Arabian desert where land-based salmon installations (recycled aquaculture systems – RAS) are proliferating; to the original home of fish farming, Norway, where just

about 1500 in all – that will disappear when the industry does.

The lifeline is offered only after

Debris washed up

one RAS will produce more salmon than Tasmania's three companies combined. Australia remains the only continent without RAS but Flanagan points out it's inevitably coming, and Tasmania's 'Big Salmon' should be planning, along with the government, for the transition. Unless Tasmania gets ahead of the curve, he argues, RAS will set up closer to mainland markets and the island state will be left holding the ruins of a 20th century technology along with its depleted marine life and the remains of Brand Tasmania built in part upon a lie.

'We are devouring a beautiful world sacred to many Tasmanians that has been reduced to a quarry for the greed of a few. Healthy? Clean and green? Wild?'

*Name changed by request
Peter George

Disclosure: Peter George played a small part in Richard Flanagan's research for *Toxic* in his role of co-chair of the Tasmanian Alliance for Marine Protection. Before he settled in Tasmania, Peter, a former foreign correspondent, assumed salmon farming would help reduce the depletion of wild fish stocks without negative impact on marine environments.



Damaged salmon pen washed ashore



BOOK REVIEW

BANKS, A BIOGRAPHY

Grantlee Kieza OAM
ABC Books, Sydney 2020.
RRP \$39.99

This is a large and extremely interesting book, laboriously researched, and stuffed full of fascinating details not confined to its subject, who, in himself, was truly a gargantuan figure. Joseph Banks, whom David Attenborough hailed as “the great panjandrum of British science”, had a profound impact on our island continent

The European “Age of Enlightenment (late 17th and 18th centuries)” ushered in such thinkers as Isaac Newton and Jonathan Swift” and while “British plantation owners were still rooted in the Dark Ages, crucifying or burning alive rebellious slaves in Jamaica, British and other European colonies, scientists and philosophers were challenging the old order.” Although a “time of profound social, scientific and economic change, wealthy families still controlled most of the land”. The Banks family traced its origins back to 14th century Sweden, when “Simon Banke had married an heiress of Newton, Yorkshire, during the reign of King Edward III.” Sir Joseph’s father, William, “came from generations of wealthy English landholders and politicians, whose riches had snowballed over the previous half-century like compounding interest.”

“Banks was an adventurous soul who possessed an endless curiosity. With his money, his contacts and his physical courage, he could change the thinking of the whole world.” At the age of 23 he had the world at his feet, “he was a remarkable specimen himself. One of the most eligible bachelors in England, he was strong, handsome, well-educated, adventurous and fabulously rich.”

Banks’ good friend Lord Sandwich, shared his interest in botany “but had been even more intrigued by human anatomy from his youth as a member of the Hellfire Club, a meeting place for eighteenth century swingers...The rich wastrels, ‘men of fashion and loose morals’, who met at London’s George and Vulture Inn from the 1730s in gatherings focused on sex, drinking, gambling, blasphemy, and more sex.” Kieza notes “With the lecherous



Lord Sandwich by his side, his life could easily have devolved into one of debauchery and indolence like those of so many of the privileged profligates of the time.”

But Banks wanted “to go where few European men had gone before...The roads to Paris, Venice and Rome were crowded with the gilded carriages of the young British well-to-do, while Banks chose a road far less travelled.”

Banks’ was 23 at the time of his first expedition to Newfoundland. He became a fellow of the Royal Society at just 24, in 1767. The Royal Society, founded in 1660, “attracted the greatest brains in Great Britain”.

It is difficult to imagine the wealth of the British upper classes, even in these days of increasing income disparity and proliferation of billionaires. Joseph Sr. “paid the bargain price of 14,000 pounds for Revesby Abbey, a ruined twelfth-century Cistercian monastery with a dilapidated country mansion...and

four hundred hectares of marshy fenland”, providing him “an annual return of 900 pounds”. At his death, at 62, Joseph Sr “had acquired vast landholdings of fourteen estates throughout England, while he had grown so fat that it was not easy to find a horse to carry him.” His funeral expenses were “about ten years’ wages for a farm labourer”. Although “Joseph Jr inherited most of his father’s wealth...He also directed his son to provide alms houses for ten farmers who had landed on hard times, to provide each of them with 50 pounds a year, and to rebuild their local church. He left 500 pounds for the Lord Mayor of London to build a children’s hospital.” “Joseph Jr gave a beloved Revesby servant...300 pounds”, knowing they shared the same father.

COMPARED TO COOK

Kieza cleverly posits Banks’ wealth and social standing against

those of James Cook, fourteen years older than Banks: “At the same time that Banks was doing his best to avoid the birch at Harrow, James Cook had the winds in the sails of his budding career at sea”, born in a Yorkshire town “a million light-years from the privileged world of Harrow. The second child of a Scottish farm labourer, Cook’s first home, in contrast to Banks’s grand abodes in London and Lincolnshire, was a tiny, damp, dark mud-walled cottage with a dirt floor, thatched roof, precious few windows and little warmth against the savage northern winter.”

“By the standards of the times Cook was a veritable giant, standing over six feet”, hard-working, earnest and dependable. At 17, Cook, good with figures, worked for a merchant and draper in the coastal village of Staithes, “then home to one of the largest fishing fleets in England.” The stories he heard “stoked his dreams of going to sea.” Cook got his start ferrying coal “from the mines around Newcastle-on-Tyne south to London”, and cargo ships crossing the North Sea. Banks’ monthly investment income was 500 pounds, while Cook’s starting salary was a mere one pound 4s.

The Royal Society had sought support from King George III for an expedition to Tahiti in order to record the 1769 transit of Venus over the sun. Kieza describes the partnership between the Royal Society and the Admiralty in the expedition as one “in which the navy’s ambitions for territorial expansion could be concealed behind the veneer of a scientific voyage.” Today we witness Space Exploration.

A Whitby collier, “The Earl of Pembroke”, was purchased by the Naval Board for 2800 pounds and renamed “The Endeavour”. Banks, only 24, despite little interest in astronomy, was excited at the prospect of discovering new species of plants and animals.

Banks then spent 10,000 pounds of his own money (a British pound in 1775 being equivalent to nearly 170 pounds today, or around 300 Australian dollars) financing and equipping an accompanying expedition of his own. As well as two of his pet dogs, Banks brought along and salaried eight others, including artist Sydney Parkinson (illustrator of flora and fauna), artist Alexander Buchan (illustrator of indigenous people, also tasked with recording their cultures), Finnish born Swede Herman

Sporing (draughtsman and watch-maker), and four of his servants (two from his Revesby Estate, two black servants from his Mayfair home “to do the heavy lifting”), and the Swedish botanist, Daniel Solander, who had studied under Carl Linnaeus, “the father of modern taxonomy” and one of Linnaeus’ 17 “apostles”.

Of the eight in Banks’ party, only Solander, and his two Revesby servants, Briscoe and Roberts, survived. His two sub-Saharan servants of tropical origin froze to death in a hastily prepared collecting trip in Tierra del Fuego, when a sudden and unexpected mid-summer blizzard struck. Banks returned with 30,300 botanical specimens and a thousand zoological specimens, increasing, by a quarter, the number of plants then known to Europeans.

Kieza provides a salacious account of Banks’ rollicks in Tahiti: “Despite his friendship with libertines such as Lord Sandwich, Tahiti was a sexual eye-opener for Banks. While he taught local girls how to kiss on the lips, they had some surprises for him, too.” The Tahitians dealt with the unintended offspring from such casual liaisons with infanticide. Venereal Disease was already widespread, contracted from two previous landings by Bougainville. Maori women were “as great coquettes as any Europeans could be and the young ones as skittish as unbroken fillies.” The women wrapped their bodies with cloth and, beneath that, a string from the leaves of a highly perfumed grass around the lower waist from which hung a small bunch of the leaves of a fragrant plant covering her womanhood.

Banks returned home after the three-year voyage, 11th July 1771, a great celebrity, with Cook largely overlooked in the fanfare, going home to his modest little home to learn his son born just after he departed had died in infancy, as well as his four-year old daughter. Meanwhile, Banks’ home suddenly became a “centre of all things scientific in Britain”. Linnaeus, keenly awaiting specimens from Terra Australis, suggested New South Wales be called “Banksia”, in honour of the “immortal Banks...an unequalled man...not only the glory of England but the whole world...”

Kieza comments: “Banks had seen thousands of remarkable species, but he had never seen a creature with a head so large as the one gazing back at him from his mirror...after the meetings with the King, the laudatory press reports, the public adulation, and all the attention from the women, Banks seemed to forget who had actually been in command...He had only been a paying passenger, but in the months after coming home he grew to have enormous tickets on himself.”

Dr John Stockard OAM

Part 2 continues next edition.



BOOK REVIEW

DINGO BOLD

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF K’GARI DINGOES

Rowena Lennox

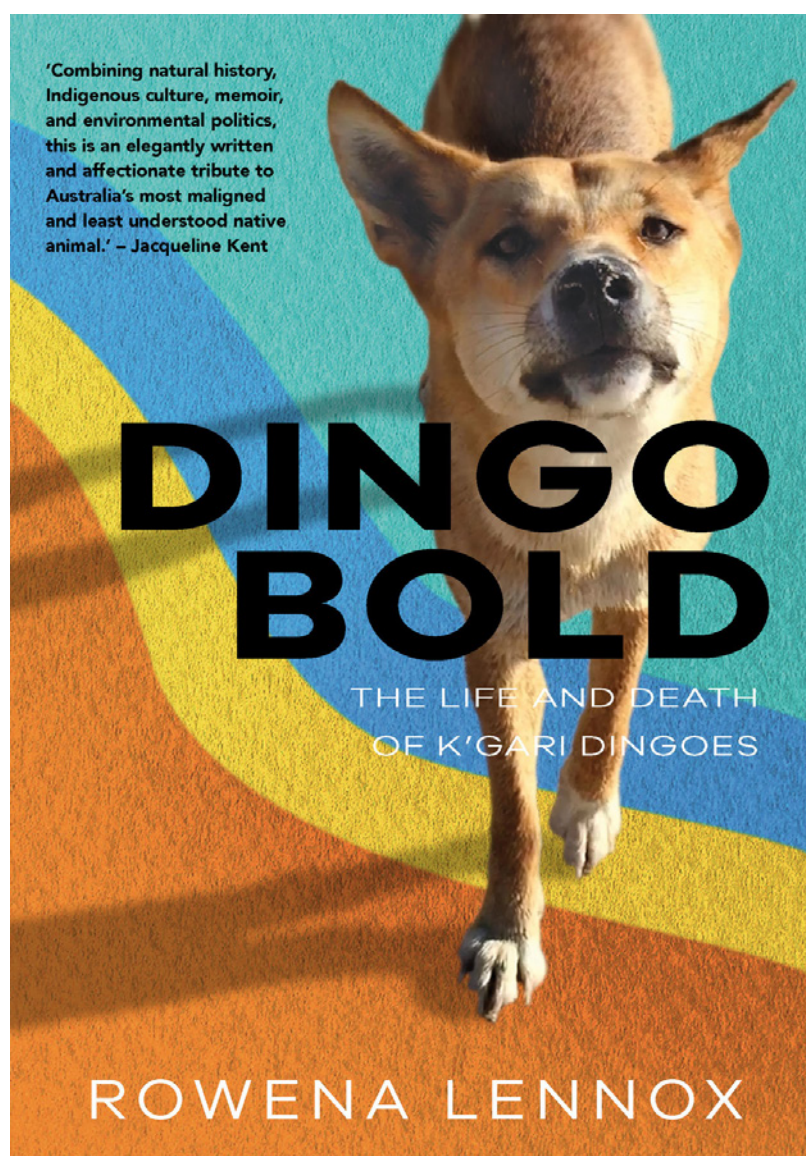
Sydney University Press \$35.00

Reviewed by Chris Lee

Dingo Bold is a fascinating new book by Rowena Lennox, about the dingoes that live on K’gari, also known as Fraser Island, which is located off the coast of Queensland. Part investigative journalism, part nature writing, and also part personal memoir, the book develops into a profound meditation on the relationship between humans and dingoes, between tourism and the wild, and between science and culture.

Lennox writes beautifully, in a powerful and evocative prose style, comparable to the work of ‘new’ nature authors such as Helen Macdonald and Robert Macfarlane. The book traces the short life of *Dingo Bold*, wonderfully creating a sense of the animal’s individuality while at the same time locating him in the tense and complex web of human-dingo interaction on K’gari.

From the relatively straightforward story of one animal however, Lennox then widens the scope to reflect on the history of dingoes in Australia, their association with Aboriginal people, and the still shocking violence of colonial occupation. Dingoes have lived beside people for thousands of years but the almost symbiotic engagement between the animals and Aboriginal people is now compromised by ever expanding settlement and the tourist industry. The dingo is now perceived as potentially threatening; ranging from mere delinquent nuisance to dangerous aggressor. The confusion of the animal’s status in human discourse, sometimes semi-domestic, sometimes wild, has constructed often impossible demands for acceptable dingo behaviour.



of the scientific literature on dingoes.

Perhaps the work is most affecting when Lennox permits glimpses of her own family history, and the intense emotion of grief and reminiscence in relation to her mother and her brother. Here, a vital dialogue with the past and with the natural world arises, and the book moves on to consider, with impressive philosophical traction, the effects of human arrogance in assuming always the apex position in any ecology. *Dingo Bold* is also therefore, a plea for a reappraisal of the project of a rapacious Australian economy, situated as it is, in a delicate natural system.

Throughout, the sheer beauty of K’gari is richly suggested: ‘K’gari shimmers and changes colour, obfuscated by stories.’ The right of the dingo to thrive in this habitat is examined and asserted. Dingoes bear

witness, Lennox insists, to the human story, and humans in turn must learn to accept the validity of the dingo’s place, ‘their right to territory and agency’. In this way, Australians may be able to recalibrate their encounters with an increasingly fragile environment.

Thoroughly recommended.

Chris Lee is an Irish playwright, short story writer and social worker living in London.

Lennox interviews dingo enthusiasts, Butchulla Aboriginal people from K’gari and rangers from the QPWS, the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. She elicits their different and often contrasting perspectives on the dingoes of the island, their future and the fate of those animals that ‘misbehave’, which is to be culled by the QPWS.

The book benefits from thorough research. As well as interviews there are the further results of field trips to the island, including photographs of *Dingo Bold* himself, an examination of the historical record and a review

WINTER AT U3A

Manning Valley University of the Third Age (U3A) is back in 2021 offering more courses and activities for the retired/semi-retired over 50 age group.



Right now, we are in the midst of our term two program bringing delight to hundreds of members old and new.

Twenty-two courses cover a range of subjects at low cost, run from two to nine weeks and are mainly held at the Manning Uniting Church, Taree. They have attracted various numbers of participants to them.

Our diverse range of courses this term includes Write Now, Philosophy, Cryptic Crosswords, Indonesian songs, Craft, Tai Chi, Time Traveller, Page to Stage, Art in the Gallery, Open Forum, Just Read, French for beginners, French comprehension and writing, Introduction to Buddhism, Folk Circle, Let's Walk and Yoga.



The popular ukulele groups and our Silver Tones Choir have bounced back with good numbers and enthusiastic performers.

Manning Valley U3A Art in the Gallery participants experience Prue Sailer's 'Endangered' as part of

the 'S.E.E. Strange, Endangered & Eternal' and Rod Spicer's 'Up River' exhibition at Manning Regional Gallery

Look out for courses likely to return in term three. These include old favourites such as: Card Sharps,

Table Games, Line Dancing and Ballroom Dancing. Other possibilities which may be added range from physics to meditation, financial activism to pencil drawing, Islam, and some further languages.

Our motto, 'Learning for Life!' sums up the rewards for being a part of Manning Valley U3A. These rewards include mental stimulation, physical activities, social interaction, learning new skills and enjoyment.

To be part of it have a look at our website, www.manningvalley.u3anet.org.au

For further information please contact Heather McLaughlin (Secretary) by email, secmanningu3a@gmail.com OR by phone, 0425 757 641.

ANNIE ROSE ACADEMY OF DANCE WINS AT TAREE EISTEDDFOD

In 1978 Kate Cheney won the Baby Dance Solo at the Taree Eisteddfod under the tutelage of her mother Bev Williamson (formerly Kyne).

Now over 40 years on Kate together with her mother Bev (principal of the academy) entered their dancers into the Allcomers Section of the dance section of the Taree Eisteddfod and were thrilled to take home first place.

Bev Williamson has lived in Halliday Shores for more than 15 years and continues to be involved in the dance school, while Kate has now expanded the studio to cover areas such as Hallidays Point, Red Head, Harrington and Taree, specialising in teaching mature dancers.

Kate is thrilled at the popularity of her "movement to music" classes and is excited to now be at their new venue, Hallidays Point Community Church, where more classes can be offered to cater for all levels of experience.



If you are interested in getting fit and enjoying great music, call Kate on 0400 340 364 or visit her website "annieroseacademyofdance.com".



ANTIQUES AND COLLECTABLES

Enjoy a great hobby that will last you a lifetime. Collecting will give you enjoyment, extend your knowledge, get you out and about and give you another enjoyable purpose as you travel. Now is a great time to collect, especially in the antiques line as prices are not strong and bargains are there to be had. Like all things, antiques have their troughs and peaks but they always come back into vogue. Now is the time to get out there and find!

Taree's Local Collectors Club has been allowed to recommence their monthly meetings at Taree Library. The members are like minded people who enjoy collecting. The meetings are held on the second Monday of each month at 2pm in the meeting room, at the back of Taree Library. We meet, discuss, show and tell of interesting finds as well as enjoy an afternoon tea together.

Interesting antiques and collectables are sometimes brought along for a swap or sell table. We would love to welcome new members. Also, if you have an interesting collection that you would like to share with our group we would love to hear from you. Ring Rex – 0427 880 546 for any further information.

Postage stamps are miniature works of art— colourful, well designed and superbly printed. Some of them commemorate famous people and events; others show animals and birds, fish and flowers, railways, ships and aeroplanes, buildings and bridges, coats-of-arms and flags, achievements in space and sport. They are educational and provide some of the most practical ways of learning about geography, history, politics and religion, and everyday life in different parts of the world.

There is a myth that stamp collecting is a dead hobby, but that's not true at all. It's still one of the most popular hobbies in the world, with more than 20 million collectors globally.

Of course, a key part of the hobby is understanding the history of the humble stamp. The most important thing to know is the world's first postage stamp was the Penny Black. It was issued in Great Britain in 1840 and it cost 1 Penny.

Within a few days, the Two Penny Blue was released. The most important thing about these stamps is that they made posting letters more affordable for common people.

Before this, recipients had to pay the letter's cost, which was a



A collection of early Australian animal stamps.

lot higher as there were no set fees. Within 10 years of the introduction of the first two stamps, the number of letters sent had risen from 68 million to 350 million, and nearly every country had started to produce its own stamps.

Both the Penny Black and the Two Penny Blue featured the head of Queen Victoria and nearly all of Britain's stamps have featured the head of the reigning monarch ever since.

The development of these postage stamps was the birth of philately and people have been collecting stamps ever since.

Most stamp collectors collect according to particular themes. By choosing one you will know which stamps to acquire. Here are some suggestions:- Australian Antarctic Territory – Separate stamps for the Australian Antarctic Territory have been issued since 1957. Cocos (Keeling) Islands & Christmas Island – Australia Post took over

responsibility for stamp production in 1993-94. Christmas – In 1957 Australia commenced issuing Christmas stamps every year and became the first country in the world to do so. Royal portraits – Queen Elizabeth II is the most featured person on Australian stamps, having been depicted on many definitive stamps from 1953 to 1971. Commemorative stamps marking royal occasions include an annual issue for the Queen's birthday. Until the Australian Legends stamp series, the reigning Monarch, and other members of the Royal Family, were the only living people who could appear on a stamp.

Birds – Many bird species have been featured on Australian stamps and the number rises appreciably if stamps of the various Australian territories are added. Aboriginal culture, art and motifs – Numerous stamps depict Aboriginal people, art and culture. Aviation – Aviation has played an important role

carrying mail in Australia and numerous stamps have been issued featuring aircraft, aviators and air mail themes.

WW1 Centenary – Between 2014 and 2018 Australia Post was producing two stamp issues a year associated with the centenary of World War I and the contribution made by our defence services over the last century.

First day covers – First day covers that bear a first day of issue postmark have been produced by Australia Post for each new stamp issue since 1970.

The most valuable Australian stamp is the Inverted Swan from Western Australia where a printing error inverted the swan to not match the writing. Only 388 copies were made before the error was spotted.

Books on stamp collecting by Renniks & Stanley Gibbons are a great guide for the avid collector.

Here are some of my regular local haunts for general antiques, they might supply a treasure for you.

Clancy's Secondhand near MRD Hospital in High St, Taree. They are into more Office Furniture these days, but my car always wants to call in as I drive past as some treasures can still be found, Barry at Isadora's Antiques – at the Valley Fair in Victoria St, Taree always has a great variety, Col in Commerce St – near the Pie shop, Sue at Delinquent Funk – Isabella St in Wingham right next to the chemist – Sue always has new and interesting stock that turns over quickly and Dave and my new shop (Antiques & Old Wares) in the old McCullaugh's Produce store also in Isabella St, in Wingham. Right next to the newsagents. Call in and say hello. Happy hunting!

If you have items that you are not sure of, I may be able to help with information, appraisals &/or sales. I love the history and stories of old and interesting treasures.

Phone Rex – 0427 880 546.
Take care and stay safe!

BOOK LAUNCH

“LOVE IS IN THE AIR” ...

... is an innovative, music-filled fun book launch for anyone over 50 who goes cold on the media's vacuous 3Cs, i.e. controversy, celebrity and crap; but warms to the cheerful 3Ws, i.e. wellbeing, wisdom and wit.

The book is *All About Older Australians*, a tonic-aplenty needed after 2020.

The tone and content are both light-hearted and serious and cover past, present and future hot topics – 21 mini books rolled into one tome.

Retired business copywriter, freelance journalist, corporate entrepreneur and now five-time author, Forster's John Buttlings, “with a little help from my friends”, will present an action-packed (no boring bits) preview.

The publisher's reviewer of John's first book in 2008 *Winning Hearts & Minds With Words* wrote: “This is highly entertaining and informative from start to finish and the author displays a mas-

terful and clever way with words.”

Reviewers of John's new book have written: “This book should reach every library in Australia”; “It sits on my coffee table, to be opened and enjoyed at odd moments of leisure”, “A lifetime's ambition beautifully captured for the best kind of Australia” and “A wonderful treasure.”

The launch will include a tribute to John's Forster-Tuncurry's Fab Four:

“Graffiti Buster Champion” Ted Bickford OAM, “I'm just a girl who can't say no” Jan Irvine, “My Fair Lady Supercharged” Doreen Wilson OAM and “Soccer. Sport. Survivor. Superman” Lance Fletcher...all community volunteers extraordinaire.

Their friends and supporters are encouraged to attend.

John says: “Bookings are required so book 'em, Danno! You can phone me on 0429 494 809 or email jsbuttlings@gmail.com.”

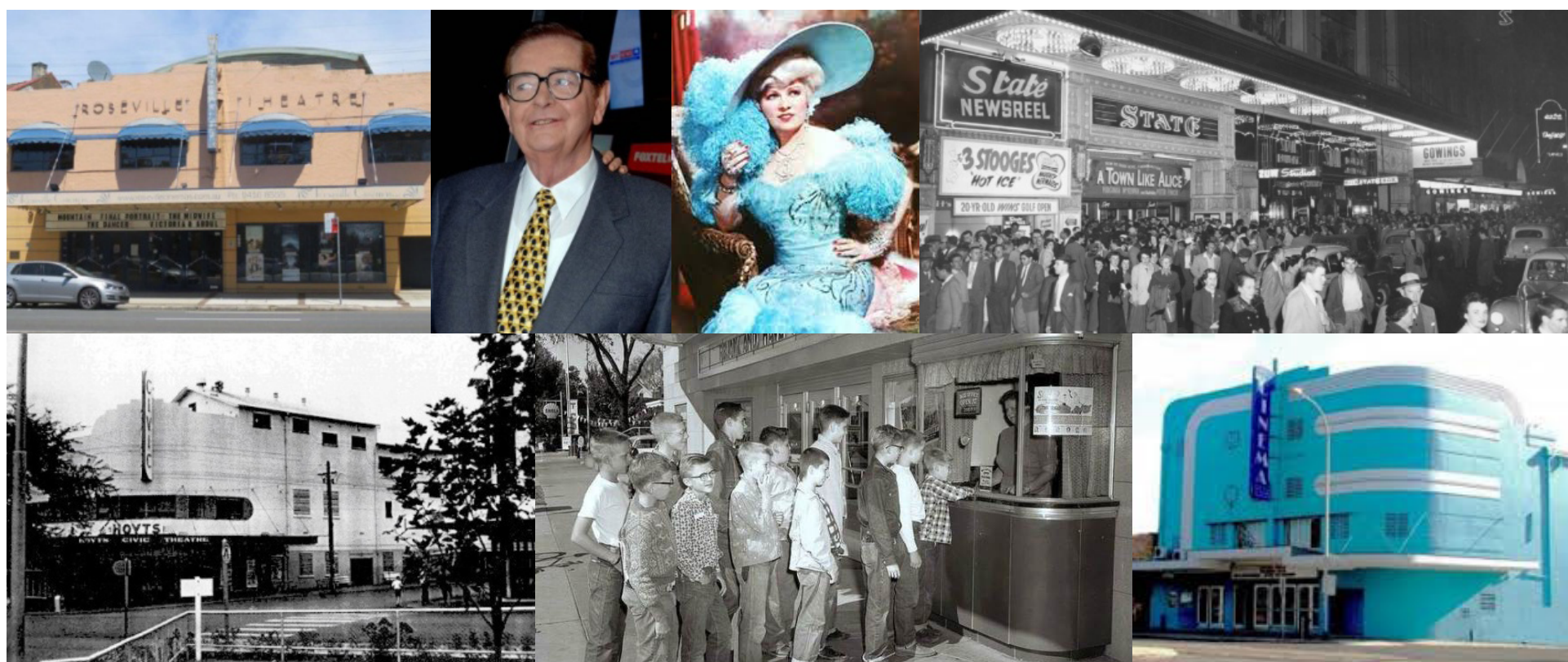
(If you can't get along for the fun, buy the book! Good on you John! Ed.)

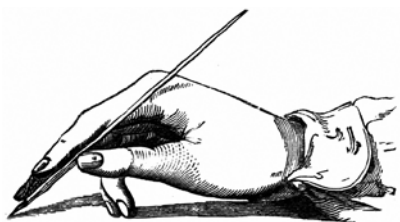


“Saturday arvo at the fllicks”

A TIME CAPSULE ACROSS 3 TIME ZONES

☺The Good Old Days ☹2020 ☺The Here and Now





YOUR SAY...

Letters may be edited for space, offensive language or defamatory reasons.

To The Editor,
re Planning Proposal Erricson Lane, Taree.

In 2016 a Draft Area Plan was presented to Greater Taree City Council, which did not have a realistic chance to approve or amend it or do anything else with it as GTCC was placed in Administration that year. Midcoast Council has sat on its hands over the plan for four years.

It is a clever move, since a draft plan is binding on no-one. It showed some possible development or rezoning down Erricson Lane, but what is now proposed is more extensive. It would be desirable for local people to have the benefit of a binding plan so that they, in turn, can plan, or have a proper idea what to oppose. Developers and Council can ignore the plan and do as they like.

If jobs and the economy are the drivers behind this proposal, the first question must be 'why'. There are huge plots available at the Bunnings

site, and the Kolodong Industrial Estate is far from full. The industrial estate at the Taree end of the Bucketts Way, adjacent to the Sale Yards, is underdeveloped. It has a beautiful road with gutters and kerbs, a luxury denied to ordinary residents of the area, whose tyres are shredded by crumbling tarmac, but who probably, paid for that road. It has a small cement works at the far end, and nothing else.

Who will pay for the road into the new and unnecessary industrial estate? The residents? Who will benefit from it? The developers and current owners? Are the current owners footing part of the bill for this rezoning proposal and the attendant reports? If successful won't the new zone increase the value of their land considerably? Are our rates paying for that?

There is no evidence that business is crying out to set up in Taree. There are empty buildings and sites all over town. Some years ago UGL was driven away by government policy over the purchase of railway

materiel. When Midcoast Trucks sought to buy the Masters building in 2017 for their growing trade and the employment it creates, they were seen off by Council which wanted the building for its new palatial HQ, rather ridiculous in a low socio-economic area with high unemployment.

Why do we need more industrial or commercial land allocation when what we have is neglected? We do not.

The land in question adjoins and includes Koala habitat. They are not migratory animals, but live in a region they regard as theirs, travelling within it. Off-setting is harmful to their welfare, especially if the chosen 'new home' is away from their corridor to access it or is a different population, or not adequate food trees to support them.

This further development near Manning River Drive is wrong.

Taree is supposed to be the hub of a tourist area. Tourist drives run through it. There are two main entrances to the town. One is to

have a huge transport hub on it, currently in course of construction, which may well be visible from the highway, particularly for occupants of southbound vehicles. The other is the southern end of Manning River Drive, a kilometre of unsightly industrial and commercial buildings on one side and half that length on the other, including the ghastly Council palace.

How any planner or Council imagined that this entrance might enchant anyone seeking a lovely tourist town is hard to envisage. The idea that this monstrous eyesore should be extended to the east is intolerable. Is the approach to Taree to be turned into a replica of downtown Chicago or Pittsburgh?

Is there no pride in Australia's countryside and wildlife, or is money the only thing close to Australian hearts?

Terry Stanton

Tinonee

Dear Editor,

Recently I was unexpectedly admitted to the Manning Base Hospital. Having never been in hospital before, I write to support the hard-working nurses.

During my week in hospital I have nothing but praise for their efforts. Their working conditions are trying at best and near impossible at worst. Each nurse has at least 8 patients to attend to, most in need of serious care, assistance and regular medication. With some patients not quite as coherent as others and all tired, grumpy, and sick. Often the nurses are required to do double shifts, miss work breaks and overlap each other in order to keep up with the work load.

The amount of paperwork and com-

puter checking on individual patients is extremely labour and time intensive, leaving limited time to cover all aspects of the job. As such, I note, and was told they are overworked, underpaid, underappreciated, and literally worked into the ground.

How they do it I do not know. Despite all this pressure they have an unwaveringly happy disposition, are cheerful, helpful and try their best to keep their patients informed, comfortable and healing.

My personal experience was with Jess, Belinda, and Mary. I marvelled at their tenacity, patience, skill and unwavering effort to provide care and support to patients on all levels whilst negotiating the minefield that is their workplace and its massive responsibilities. Remember, these people

are changing patient's lives. It shouldn't be at the detriment to their own lifestyle and health.

Surely more can be done to increase the staffing levels and pay, and ease the tremendous pressure they work under. With all the talk about looking after frontline workers in the current pandemic, someone has forgotten our everyday hospital nurses. THESE PEOPLE ARE AMAZING. We should be looking after them, not taking them for granted.

I will be following up with correspondence to our local MP and the Press and hope others will also take an opportunity to speak up for our nurses, after all, where would we be without them?

Jan Hodge

Wingham

REMEMBER THIS

WINGHAM RAILWAY STATION WITH THE OLD GOODS SHED, NOW GONE BUT WHERE A NEW OLD STYLE BUILDING COULD BE A "MUSEUM OF MEMORABILIA."





AGED 50 AND OVER?

COVID-19 vaccines continue to roll out to those most at risk.

People aged 50 and over can receive their COVID-19 vaccine at one of the selected vaccination clinics or at participating general practices.

It's voluntary, free and the best way to protect you and your community.

Our Therapeutic Goods Administration continues to closely monitor the safety of all vaccines in Australia.

**To find out where you can get
vaccinated visit australia.gov.au
or call 1800 020 080**

COVID-19
✓ VACCINATION

KEEPING AUSTRALIA COVIDSAFE

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