

THE NEW BUSH TELEGRAPH

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Cruise Ships: Threat to Clean, Green Image

CHRIS GROUNDS & PAT THOMPSON

A question posed by Councillor Amanda Findley during Shoalhaven City Council's debate on the proposed dredging of the entrance to Currambene Creek has raised concerns over the City's clean, green image. A muted response to Councillor Findley's question points to behind the scenes dealings that the NBT has been pursuing and results in new information for the public to digest.

Council's story to the need for this project relates to requests from local commercial operators and cruise ship companies. This was repeated at the second of the two Huskisson Community meetings of Council in response to community questions.

The local operators are reasonably well known but it would have been informative if they had actually been asked or prepared to present their case

to the community meetings as safe navigation is certainly a shared ideal and the prosperity of Huskisson businesses is relevant to their activities.

What then do we know of the 'cruise ship operators'? Well, here is a story of a darker dimension.

To say that it has been difficult to determine who exactly the mysterious cruise ship operators are would be an understatement but the infected tooth was eventually pulled.

There was no opportunity at the second Huskisson meeting as questions were limited and this was a particular question denied an airing.

Formal enquiry at Council's Natural Resources and Floodplain Committee [NRFC] elicited no information from either staff or councillors at the Central Shoalhaven meeting. No one from Council appeared to have any idea though it was suggested that a Council staffer from the 'Economic development' department may be able to assist.

The Committee direction to Council's Economic Development section produced a classic non-answer: "approaches come from both the specific (cruise ship) Operators..." but no name was forthcoming. In regard to the manner in which they make their requests: "approaches to Council from the cruise line operators have come in a number of different ways..."

However, the answer of which, cruise company or companies was still not in the public domain.

On May 19 at the Council meeting, Councillor Amanda Findley launched the question to the floor of a full Council meeting.

Amid the theatre of silence the Mayor had to virtually insist that someone answer the question of who was the cruise ship operator requesting dredging; asking for people to just stop looking at each other and answer. As to why the Mayor did not answer Councillor Findley's question is unclear.

It was left to the General Manager who answered that it was Carnival Cruises that had significant contact with Council on the dredging question though this association was excused as it was Marine Parks who were responsible for the permit for Carnival Cruises to use Jervis Bay.

A 2014 global "Cruise Ship Report Card" by Friends of the Earth determined that "the worst offender is Carnival Cruise Line by a long shot. It earned an "F" for sewage treatment again this year." Carnival Cruises also earned an "F" for Transparency and a "D" for Air Pollution Reduction. As for air pollution the report notes "most cruise lines burn filthy high-sulfur fuels including nasty bunker fuels. According to the EPA, each day an average cruise ship is at sea it emits more sulphur dioxide than 13 million cars and more soot than 1 million cars."

The 'bunker fuels' causes asthma, heart disease, cancer,

respiratory illness and premature death and is banned in the United States and Europe. The fumes from these ships docked in Sydney have created a major public health issue and have led to a ban on their overnight berthing. Perhaps it was knowledge of these facts that contributed to Council's reticence to specifically name the cruise company that had been making representations to it.

Council bear a key ethical responsibility for negotiating with such an allegedly environmentally damaging company and Marine Parks can answer for themselves at a different level but they cannot be Council's excuse. With a ban now placed on Carnival Cruise ships overnight berthing in Sydney the question remains, will they be welcome in Jervis Bay?

Surely this is not the sort of cruise ship operator that those who associate with Jervis Bay at any level would approve of being involved in our coast or its management. ■



letters

CONSERVATION DOUBLE DIPPING

When Janet and I entered into our Conservation Agreement with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service in 2000 we understood that it would ensure that the property over which we had custodianship, adjacent to the Barren Ground Nature Reserve, would be managed in the interests of its biodiversity in perpetuity.

The Conservation Agreement is meant to ensure that the habitat of Sooty owls, Spotted Tailed Quolls, Eastern Pygmy Possums, Gregarious Burrowing Bees, Kiama's own Zeiria granulata amongst other things would be protected.



It respects the biodiversity for its own intrinsic values and minimises the impact that humans will have over time.

The concept that biodiversity has intrinsic value is about to change with the new NSW 'Biodiversity Conservation Act', aiming "to maintain a healthy, productive and resilient environment for the greatest wellbeing of the community,"

In other words the "management" of biodiversity is now directly related to human wellbeing.

What's more our precious Conservation Agreement can now be traded as an "offset" to allow the destruction of biodiversity at another location. So we protect something already here and that allows something elsewhere to be destroyed.

We and other conservation agreement owners set out to protect areas for their own values not to justify and support the destruction of biodiversity elsewhere. The rich flora and fauna of our property is not a "tradeable commodity".

**Howard Jones and Janet Mayer,
Foxground**

Some Steps Forward

CHRIS GROUNDS

PRIOR COVERAGE OF Council's dredging program in the NBT noted some flaws in community engagement.

It was notable however that at the last round of community meetings a record was made by staff of questions and answers arising in the meeting. If it is not, one can only wonder at the point of the meetings, especially if they are billed as 'community consultation'.

The feedback these meetings provide is important and should be part of the permanent record and recognized.

A major recent strategy by Council has been to advertise and proceed to appoint a consultant firm, Straight Talk, to manage the "Provision of Services to design and implement a Citywide Coastal Community Engagement Strategy [REF 50511E]."

This is an interesting initiative which should prove really positive and bring professional expertise and experience to a challenging area of the Shoalhaven. It should also bring increased benefits to the community.

The project is jointly funded by Council and the Office of Environment and Heritage.

This follows on another less recent initiative by Council to use a community based 'Reference Group' to deal with environmental and management issues arising at Collingwood Beach.

It is also worth noting that the Huskisson community meeting which launched this idea was handled by a trained, independent facilitator, an approach with merit ignored for the dredging community meetings.

An excellent initiative has been a community Newsletter, "The Frontline News - Coastal Management in the Shoalhaven, the first edition of which was provided through a Council email network in August 2014. ■

Editorial

Getting The Job Done

THE LONG-RUNNING SAGA of the Shaolin Temple fiasco took another twist back in March when Council voted against a buy back option on the Comberton Grange estate with Team Gash Councillors reversing the position that they had held two weeks earlier. This led to Councillor Findley making claims that Team Gash "are openly caucusing in Council offices despite the Code of Conduct frowning on this". In response to the vote Mayor Gash told ABC Radio that "Councillors are entitled to change their minds and that's obviously what happened". This may be so but it is not a good look.

Following what was a torrid meeting came allegations from Councillor Guile that "Shoalhaven City Council is now a haven for bullying and intimidation for anyone who attempts to call the Mayor to account in the public interest

or even just holds a different point of view". More worrying however was that according to reports in the South Coast Register the Councillor's claims have been backed by a number of employees who say morale is at an all-time low. The Register also reported that this was not the opinion of the city's general manager Russ Pigg whose view of any disquiet amongst staff related to restructuring and downsizing that has been occurring with Council over the past two years.

Whilst the general manager's defence may be plausible what is noteworthy is that much of the comment from the complaining employees was specific to the Mayor. Certainly Mayor Gash's forthright management style was much in evidence at the recent community meetings on the dredging issue where a sense of impartiality was absent and a measure of the Mayor's "rude-

ness" was observed by some of those present. Her experience in a former life as Liberal Party Whip in Federal Parliament may have earned her the title of "Madame Lash" but this does not augur well if she "bullies and belittles staff" as has been claimed.

The Mayor's role is clearly defined. Councillors and mayors are not responsible for overseeing the work done by local government employees. This is done by the chief executive officer and senior staff. Mayor Gash knows this, just as she knows her role as leader of Council is to ensure good governance and the promotion of positive relationships amongst her Council peers. With more than a year before the next Council election the pressure is now on Mayor Gash to demonstrate that she is providing the leadership that our community expects. ■

Why have a meeting when you can have a party?

GRAEME GIBSON

Community development is where a community acts to improve its social, economic or environmental situation. This isn't rocket science, it's actually more complex than that. Rockets go in pre-determined straight lines (mostly), people have minds of their own and tend to go all over the place until they find their direction.

Peter Kenyon works in community development and calls himself a social capitalist. For more than 20 years he's successfully worked with communities around Australia and internationally, helping stimulate local community renewal. Based in WA, Peter was in Nowra in April, hosted by Shoalhaven City Council giving presentations to council and community members on building healthy, inclusive, caring and safe communities.

Peter is the founder of the Bank of I.D.E.A.S. - Initiatives for the Development of Enterprising Action and Strategies. The Bank of I.D.E.A.S. approach is based on 10 key beliefs. The first of

these: "Meaningful and lasting community change always originates from within, and local residents/members in that community are the best experts on how to activate that change." More information is at <http://bankofideas.com.au>

Peter's presentation was the first of an "In Conversation" series of events within the theme of community development. The second, on June 1, was with Jim Diers from

Seattle. Led by Jim, Seattle built an international reputation for its approach to planning. For 14 years from 1988 he was director of Seattle's Department of Neighborhoods, (with apologies to Americans who can't spell).

Much of his work is based in Asset Based Community Development, or ABCD as it's known. This starts from and with the strengths or assets of a community, rather than its weaknesses or deficits. Jim's number one lesson for community development is have fun. Why have a meeting when you can have a party? More of Jim's work is at <http://www.neighborpower.org>

Alan Blackshaw, council's community development coordinator, is planning regular events with Australian and international presenters with the next being in August. This is great stuff from Shoalhaven City Council and I look forward to future events, particularly those that bring council staff and councillors together with community members - breaking down the silos that tend to emerge when people work in isolation.

If you would like notice of future events in the "In Conversation" series email council@shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au with "Community Development In Conversation" in the subject. ■



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The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Editor.

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Printer: Weston Print, Kiama NSW
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Is It Sand Mining or Dredging for Sussex?

CHRIS GROUNDS & PAT THOMPSON

SHOALHAVEN CITY COUNCIL'S decision to go ahead with planned dredging of parts of the Sussex Inlet channel raises questions as to what is to be done with the sand. In overturning a proposed amendment by Councillor Findley aimed at blocking the sale of sand Council voted in favour of inviting "expressions of interest for the project" before considering the cost/benefit of selling the sand.

This controversial decision appears to be at odds with environmental concerns and prudent financial management. The dredging projects at Sussex, Huskisson and Lake Conjola have an estimated cost in excess of one point four million dollars and according to the Review of Environmental Factors (REF) documents come with serious

environmental consequences.

It was pointed out by submission to all Councillors early in the dredging saga that the proposal for Sussex Inlet contradicted the existing St Georges Basin Estuary Management Plan, which had quite specifically addressed the dredging matter. Such work may be a waste of public money as perceived benefits from dredging are likely at best to have only short term effects on channel depths and come at a significant environmental cost.

As noted in the REF, "Threatened shorebirds are known to utilise the inlet channel area. Removal of sand from this area will remove both nesting and foraging habitats for their species". The REF also states in advice given by the NSW Office of Environment & Heritage that "The proposal to remove sand out of the local marine system and sell for

commercial purposes contradicts the principle of conservation and is not supported".

SAND MINING

Importantly, Council have steadfastly avoided using the term "sand mining" for the Sussex operation, presumably because it has some really negative connotations. The technical definition, Council's definition, applies at Sussex Inlet where it is proposed to sell dredged sands to the construction industry. It is not simply dredging. The 3,000 cubic metres of sand for sale was highlighted during the Community Consultative meeting where it was stated that there had been "Expressions of interest from construction firms" for purchasing the sand.

The General Manager's staff REF report highlighted that the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage had in their submission, strongly objected to the



Councillor Amanda Findley

sale of sand, a stance identified as a shared key submissions issue.

FINANCIAL BURDEN

Council were also warned by staff in their report that "the life cycle cost of dredging is high and would not generally

be acceptable for other assets it manages".

Clearly this operation is not cheap nor economic and is bound to be very expensive to repeat in the context of an unknown timeline and, again, this was an issue identified in submissions.

At both Sussex Inlet and Callala residents have voiced their concerns with the damage to local residential roads likely to be caused by industrial sized trucks moving sand through the towns and with the cost of repairs as yet to be factored into the project costs. It is estimated that for Sussex Inlet the removal of 3,000 cubic metres of sand will involve over 1,000 truck movements with half of these involving heavily laden trucks that are likely to cause significant road damage. The movement of sand from Lake Conjola to Mollymook has raised similar concerns. ■

The Riviera Keys – Sussex Inlet

BERNIE CLARKE

ANTHROPOGENIC (HUMAN) IMPACT on coastal geomorphology gave birth to the Riviera Keys.

Eighteen thousand years ago the sea level was about 120 metres below its present level and was steadily rising 1 metre per 100 years. The coastline near Sussex Inlet was about 10-15 kilometres east of present.

The sea reached its present level at the end of the Holocene epoch and stabilised about six thousand years B.P. (before present). Thus the birth of a swamp marsh, which in later years was to be transformed into a Sylvania Waters style Keys development.

After extensive dredging and placement of ballast to shape the Keys openings the estate was subdivided into 300 water front lots and were handed over to real estate agents approximately 30 years ago.

The blocks spilling into the canal waters soon attracted owners of boats, most powered by outboard motors as well as a mix of various water craft. It also became apparent to Council that a speed limit and no wash zones had to be imposed. Thus the entire Keys waters are subject to a 4 knot speed limit and a no wash restriction. Signs are displayed at the Keys entrance.

What is of concern to Keys property owners is the asbestos issue and Council's maintenance of revetment walls, requiring the removal of rock ballast to retrieve asbestos they have identified as having been in the fill dumped there during construction. And Council want to bill the ratepayers for this highly expensive operation with no guarantee the site will EVER BE free of all traces of asbestos particles.

The problem, unlike other sites containing dumped asbestos, is the removal – a

daunting task. Buried under tonnes of rock ballast and so on – it can't be hosed off.

We want Council to leave it there, it is inert. Council owns the revetments, thus any person interfering with, or removing ballast may be prosecuted.

The Keys Anti Dredging committee request Council to take more interest in protecting sea-grasses. Constructed 30 years ago the Keys looks to have a bright future in terms of biodiversity. Sea-grasses have colonised deep in the areas devoid of plant life 15 years ago. An intertidal and sub-tidal band of sea-grass occupies the edges of the channels in most areas down to a depth of more than 2 metres, with a mix of Eelgrass (*Zostera*) and Strap Weed (*Posidonia*).

SEA-GRASS

What do you know about sea-grasses, the world's No.1 sequester of carbon?

Concentration of carbon in sea-grasses is about 1,000 parts per million and when left undisturbed can live for thousands of years.

Australia has 25 species of sea-grass including the world's largest single sea-grass bed, the Wooramel bank in Shark Bay, WA. It has 1,000 square kilometres in area and has taken 5,000 years to develop.

Sea-grasses are not true grasses (nor are they algae or seaweed). They are flowering plants with stems, leaves, roots and horizontal stems. They shed leaves and provide food, shelter, breeding grounds and nursery habitats for fish and aquatic crustacean. They help to create permanent communities of algae and marine animals with an endless food source in the form of detritus, composed of decayed leaf litter, lining the seabed. They stabilise the seabed with their roots and horizontal stems, this prevents fragile estuary sea

bottoms eroding.

Sea-grasses play a vital role in coastal ecosystems of the world. They are particularly important in the sustainability of commercial and recreational fisheries primarily because of their role in maintaining sediment stability and water quality and in providing shelter and food critical to the survival of a wide variety of aquatic biota. They produce a large amount of

organic material which enters the food chain.

Sea-grass beds are a microcosm world of organisms; every blade is enriched with epiphytes, the main food source also for filter feeders such as echinoderms, crustaceans, molluscs, starfish and many fish species.

Studies have shown 15 square kilometres yielded 235 million prawns including their larvae and 95 billion molluscs and rates

second only to coral reef communities in productivity.

Sea-grasses are a fragile habitat with *Posidonia* (strap weed) and are comparatively restricted in their distribution. Attempts to regrow *Posidonia* in denuded habitats will fail.

We had better manage our carbon emissions and save our sea-grasses, for every second breath we take comes from the ocean. ■

Heart of Huskisson Update

KATE BROADHURST

AS MOST SHOALHAVEN residents will know, the Heart of Huskisson campaign was successful. For several weeks in February we held our breath while Club Jervis Bay deliberated its options. We were elated when they chose Shoalhaven City Council's offer of \$3.3 million (including GST) as the winning bid to purchase 59 Owen Street.

When Jervis Bay Tourism, Huskisson Chamber of Commerce and Huskisson Woollamia Community Voice joined together to run the Heart of Huskisson campaign, we had agreed on a clear goal: "To lobby three level of government, Federal, State and Local to bring the empty land block at 59 Owen Street Huskisson into public ownership." We are thrilled to have achieved this goal and also a commitment from Council that they will "proceed immediately to consider development plans which do not compromise views from Owen Street, Huskisson." (My italics)

So, what happens next?

Council wants to create a 'masterplan' for what they call the 'Huskisson foreshore precinct', which includes the council's land at 59 Owen Street, the Club Jervis Bay (the RSL)

land, The Huskisson Hotel and the adjoining reserve areas. As well as this masterplan, council will be looking at preliminary design concepts for 59 Owen Street with the idea of creating "a multi-purpose space with potential commercial development options for lease and a public precinct area (or areas) for community and visitor use," says Gordon Clark, Strategic Planning Manager at Shoalhaven City Council.

Council has committed to consulting extensively with the community throughout the process, and according to John Wells, Deputy Mayor, they will shortly announce the specialist urban design consultant company that has been selected to run this project.

Council will form a 'community reference group', which will include representatives from Jervis Bay Tourism, Huskisson Woollamia Community Voice and the Huskisson Chamber of Commerce as well as other stakeholders, interested parties and councillors. This group will "contribute feedback and input to both the masterplan and the development concepts."

Heart of Huskisson group is now 'incorporated', but in our general meeting in March we decided to 'mini-warehouse'

the group as we have achieved our initial goal and it is clearly sensible for us to concentrate on representing our individual associations in the upcoming community consultation process. We also agreed that should the need arise we could wheel Heart of Huskisson Inc out of its 'warehouse' at very short notice.

The campaign to save the block was a huge effort for many of us, but every minute was worth it if we succeed in creating a visionary outcome for the magnetic centre of our beautiful town. We would like to say a big thank you to Shoalhaven Council for finding the funds and to Club Jervis Bay for choosing the council's bid, but most of all we want to thank our big-hearted community who showed so much spirit, generosity and passion.

P.S. There were too many optimistic zeros in the Autumn edition story about Heart of Huskisson. Clearly we did not 'secure pledges of \$1,000,000'. (#107 page 5). However we did receive pledges for more than 100 thousand dollars in our one million dollar 'all-or-nothing' crowdfunding campaign. Apologies for my hyperbolic error. ■

The Heritage Estate

CHRIS GROUNDS

AT THE TIME 'The New Bush Telegraph' published a seminal article on 'The Heritage Estate Saga' by Sally Gjedsted and Pat Thompson in Autumn 2009 the conservation battle had been running for nigh on twenty years.

The article also highlighted one of the most critical watersheds in Estate environmental history.

In March 2009 Peter Garrett, then Federal Minister, made the decision under the provisions of the Commonwealth EPBC Act 1999 that the Heritage Estate lands could not be rezoned from Rural to Residential for development.

Critically and appropriately, a development paradigm had been usurped by an environmental paradigm for the Heritage Estate, which acknowledged the nationally significant ecological values of the Estate.

The matters of Threatened Species, high environmental value, habitat corridors and biodiversity, especially in Booderee National Park, were the key planks in the decision.

The decision was hailed at the time by all concerned with the conservation of the Estate environment and there was a great sense of relief and a feeling that the 'war' had been won at last.

The perspective of time these six years on now shows that whilst it was a turning point, the conservation challenge continued unabated so that at this point in 2015 Council's commitment to an Environment Conservation zoning has still not been applied, inclusion in Jervis Bay National Park is closer but not yet secure and most of all, the Estate environment continues to suffer with the almost complete lack of strategic and operational, environmental management.

The Garrett decision outraged landholders of course as they had quite overt local political support for rezoning and a manic igno-

rance of the environmental values of the country they had acquired.

It also 'outraged' Federal member of the time, Joanna Gash who threatened to repeal Garrett's decision if and when in government, despite the fact that the Act in question was John Howard legislation she supported in parliament. A visit from the Shadow Minister of her party, Greg Hunt, silenced that errant thought.

It did though throw all interested agencies into a challenging search for a new solution, which could accommodate the Estate environmental values and resolve the peculiarities of tenure in the 'Paper Estate'.

Protracted conferencing and negotiation ensued from May 2009 to October 2012. This involved Shoalhaven Council, NSW National Parks and Wildlife, the Commonwealth Environment division and later, the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife, in developing applications for the Commonwealth Caring for Country Program funding.

Yet another critical watershed was reached in October 2012 when it was announced that the second application for funding had been successful and \$5.4 million Commonwealth Grant would be available with a supplement of \$60,000 from the Foundation NPW, who would act as managers of the Grant.

The purpose of the project, which continues to this day, is to acquire all lands in the Estate for inclusion in the Jervis Bay National Park.

This money is funding for a voluntary purchase scheme, the Heritage Estate Voluntary Land Project [HELP], in which landowners would be paid \$5000 per Lot with a bonus \$500 for an early sale.

Part of the arrangement was that Council rezone the Estate and associated reserves to Environment Conservation though this is still to be finalised,



Supporters Walk celebrates Commonwealth funding

delayed in part by Councillors' refusal to accept rezoning as part of the Local Environment Plan deliberations, despite its recommendation by all other contributing parties and agencies, including their own staff.

Council would also donate the roads, the St Georges Avenue Reserve and the Lots it owned because of rates surrender, 76 in all as at May 2013. The Worroving Creek Crown Land Reserve was to be part of the plan.

Interestingly, Warren Halloran retained a sizeable portion of streamside land, originally set aside as a park in his father's Pacific City as "Bindaree Park", though he has promised this for inclusion in the National Park.

Voluntary sales had proceeded and reached close to 500 'offers to sell' by May 2013 when June Esposito and a small group of landholders commenced a Federal Court 'class action', pursuing a raft of claims including compensation for 'unjust acquisition of land', conspiracy to injure them because of loss of land value and judicial review of the Garrett decision.

Their attempt to prevent sale of Lots continuing was dismissed and costs awarded against them in the Federal Court.

The case concluded in October

2013 and so commenced a long, agonising wait during which offers to sell Lots in the Estate fell to a trickle.

The decision was finally delivered, after four postponements, at 12.30 pm on December 24, 2014 with the Landowners Case being "Dismissed and Costs Awarded".

The Landowners subsequently lodged an Appeal against this decision and this went before the Federal Court bench in late February this year. A decision is pending.

A portion of 20ha adjoining the Estate along The Wool Road and Naval College Road was included in the National Park in late 2014 and two remnant Pacific City Estates opposite the Estate have been rezoned to Environment Conservation in 2014 [see map].

Critically, whilst these historic moments and events of the past six years have been positive, the Estate environment has languished under the burden of serious vegetation damage and destruction, soil erosion, disturbance of fauna, delay, ease of access, intrusions, trailbikes, 4X4 driving and relentless, rubbish dumping including asbestos,

On a more positive note the Bird catalogue has been extended by four species, including a Threatened Species, the Little Eagle, a photographic catalogue of the previously unrecognized

fungi and Estate Flora developed and some neglected specifics of ecology noted in field studies.

If anything, the Estate environment is more noteworthy and valuable than previously recognized.

The distressing lack of environmental management and responsibility over these years has been an enormous burden on Estate ecology and environmental status.

Ironically, the desired changes should occur in the centenary year of Henry Halloran's doomed Pacific City concept, now an historic anomaly, its transition signposted by four phases of land sales for the same Wandrawandian country from Land Grant to National Park involving many tens of millions of dollars, mostly for private profits.

Many readers will be aware that over the last four years a community based conservation network, HEST, has operated to pursue the conservation of Heritage Estate and associated issues.

The network has operated to research, inform and act in all Estate conservation matters, communicating through a regular newsletter HEST and building a profile with all agencies to indicate an informed, caring and concerned community exists and will continue, as they always have over the last 25 years, to demand the conservation of Heritage Estate.

Readers interested to be included in the network can contact the author. ■

Below: (left) Bauers Midge Orchid – Threatened Species; (right) Leafless Tongue Orchid – Threatened species



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Trouble At Museum

PETER LAVELLE*

It was high noon, or more accurately 11 am, on April 22nd, at the Jervis Bay Maritime Museum, that institution formerly known as the Lady Denman Museum, in the bayside village of Huskisson.

MEMBERS, VOLUNTEERS AND employees had gathered at a Special General Meeting to vote on the Museum's recent change of name, and on the future of incumbent President John Fergusson, and tempers were running high.

For months, two opposing parties with conflicting notions of what 'the Denman' should be, and whose interests it should serve, had clashed in the local media and via heated emails and letters sent back and forth amongst the Museum's members.

For those not familiar with Jervis Bay and its attractions, a brief account of the Museum and its history is in order here. Situated on Woollamia Road outside the entrance to the village of Huskisson, the Museum was originally built to house the Lady Denman, a boat built in Huskisson in 1911 and named after Lady Gertrude Denman, wife of the Governor General of Australia at the time. The boat, a wooden screw steamer, served as a Sydney harbour ferry until in 1979, when she was retired and faced the threat of the scrap yard until she was rescued and sailed back to Huskisson thanks to the efforts of local Jervis Bay citizens and organizations, who lobbied state and federal governments for funds for the purchase and for the construction of the building that now houses the ferry. And no-one played a more significant role in this history than former South Coast independent state MP John Hatton, now in his 80s, who for 17 years served as the Museum's first president; and his wife Vera Hatton, after whom the museum's Vera Hatton gallery is now named.

Over the years the museum was expanded; a valuable collection of maritime and surveying instruments was gifted by local landowner Warren Halloran. Permanent exhibitions reflecting the history of the area, and purpose-built galleries and curatorial areas were built. With several ongoing boat restoration projects, notably those of the 'Crest' and the 'Kingfisher', the Museum is today arguably Jervis Bay's most important cultural attraction.

However, in 2014, the muse-

um's future was becoming a matter of concern to the Museum's board of Directors. Despite the significance of its exhibits, visitors were few and ticket sales were down. Neither the rental from stallholders at the monthly markets held on the grounds, nor the \$100,000 annual grant from Shoalhaven Council, were enough to ensure financial viability. Visitations had to increase, or the Museum would go under, the Board concluded.

One big problem was that the existing name, the Lady Denman heritage Complex, was not Google friendly. Visitors from outside the region, who made up the bulk of visitors, had trouble finding it. Signs advertising the museum were confusing; the name gave no indication that the museum was actually located in Jervis Bay, or what was on display there, other than the ferry. And who was Lady Denman anyway?

So in late 2014 the Board, as part of a strategic plan for the future, decided a new name was needed. The trading name became the Jervis Bay Maritime Museum and a new logo with new colours was devised. This new name would reflect the location, the museum's purpose and identity and it would show up on Google searches. The old name, the Lady Denman Heritage Complex Incorporated, would stay as the registered corporate entity.

President John Fergusson announced the changes to members at the Annual General Meeting on 10th October 2014. No-one objected. At the next meeting of the Board of the Museum on November 4th, the new name was unanimously adopted. Members not at the Annual General Meeting read about the changes in the President's Report, sent to them by email in October 2014. Again in February 2015 members were told of the changes in a newsletter which included the proposed new graphics. In a separate general feedback survey sent out in January, only one member out of the 75 who responded commented on the name change.

The new signage went up outside the Museum. Shoalhaven Council was noti-

fied and signs appeared on the road into Jervis Bay directing visitors to the Jervis Bay Maritime Museum.

And so the Board considered the job was done.

Alas, it was quite so simple or easy. In March, the issue exploded when John Hatton, on learning of the name change, reacted with fury and outrage. Away in New Zealand when the previous October Annual General Meeting was held, he read of the name change in an article in the South Coast Register. He wrote to the Board, with a litany of complaints.

The Board had needlessly trashed community goodwill built up over years, he declared. The change of name was needlessly expensive. The colours of the new logo were wrong; they were blue, they should have been red. The latest advertising brochure contained spelling mistakes. There were other issues; some members had not been invited to the annual Christmas party. Fergusson, whose work as a former Shoalhaven councillor had not impressed Hatton, was a complete disaster and a disgrace. Fergusson had to go; he, Hatton, would stand for President instead and the Museum's old name would be restored.

Hatton found a sympathetic ear amongst other members with issues with the current Board and its President. These included the Museum's current Vice President, who had been at odds with the rest of the Board on a number of matters. The group included a former Treasurer of the museum, and other members who felt their Museum was cold-shouldering their plans to hold social functions on the premises. Co-opting wives and friends, the group had no trouble getting the five per cent of the membership required by the Museums' Constitution to force a Special Member's meeting, where they would present two motions to the membership; i.e. that Fergusson be given his marching orders, and that the Museum revert to the old name.

The group appropriated the list of members' email addresses and began sending out missives to the members by email, arguing their case.

Hatton took to the airways, where he achieved a mixed reception, gaining his best exposure on local commercial radio station 2ST. On air, and without going into specifics, he alleged numerous misdemeanours, procedural bungles and breaches of the Corporations Law made by Fergusson and the Board, angrily brushing aside suggestions by the station presenter Chris Firth that perhaps he, Hatton, was getting on a bit in years, and it was all a bit of a storm in a teacup.

Finally, the big day came. In expectation of a major rumble, two thirds of the membership, i.e. approximately 80 members, turned out to vote, with Shoalhaven Mayor Joanna Gash and four councillors also present as observers. When the voting was done, by secret ballot, and the numbers counted, the rebels had fallen far short of the 75 per cent of votes needed to carry the motions. The majority of those present had voted against both motions; hence, the new name was to stay, and Fergusson would stay on as President.

Admitting that in retrospect perhaps things could have been handled in a more inclusive way, Fergusson and the Board offered a compromise. To the name 'Jervis Bay Maritime

Museum' the words 'Home of the Lady Denman Ferry' would be added on the relevant signage, letterheads, etc, where space permitted. This motion was passed, along with other motions requiring small groups of members in future to go through mediation before calling Special Members Meetings.

Then everyone went home. The next day, Ken Bullock, Vice President and a prominent member of the break-away group, and John Hill, the IT manager responsible for the email list, both resigned their positions. Hatton himself went quiet and has since made no further public comment.

Life returned to normal at the Museum, which today bears no marks of the showdown on April 22. The ducks still feed in the pond and the Port Jackson sharks can be seen in the inlet of the creek at dusk. Peace has descended on the Jervis Bay Maritime Museum, home of the Lady Denman ferry. But for how long? ■

* Peter Lavelle is a presenter at Shoalhaven Community Radio Station Triple U Fm. His partner Diana Lorentz sits on the board of the Jervis Bay Maritime Museum and he assisted the Board of the Museum as a media advisor during the events described above.

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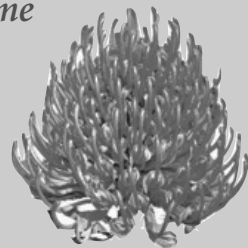
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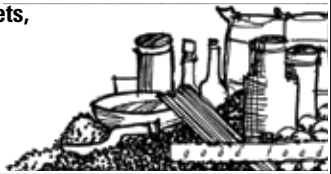
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Telling stories like they matter

**CRAIG GAYMER –
SHOALHAVEN TRANSITION**

IT IS AN interesting process to reflect upon the stories that we tell ourselves, to take a step back from the narratives that define who we are both personally and as a society. Film, literature and news would have to be three of the major modern narrative setters. I don't mind a bit of news. I've been through phases, when I was less pressed for time, where I would spend an hour or so every day trawling through a broadsheet newspaper. I was in the habit of cutting out interesting articles, anything that seemed socially significant or seemed to contribute to what I thought might be "the larger story". For a while I would file them or paste them in a book in the hope of making sense of it all. I am not sure whether the Peter Goldsworthy's character Eduard Keller of "Maestro", much mulled over in my High School graduation year, inspired this behaviour... but like him, news-reading was not about the parts, or their sum for that matter, it was about trying to find the grand narrative that holds it all together.

In retrospect, I was assessing the narratives being offered by what I considered more serious newspapers in an effort to come up with a coherent world narrative that made sense to me and I figured that this newsprint media must be a relatively reputable source of information. When no "grand narrative" seemed to materialise from my collecting "pieces of the puzzle" I instinctively projected my piecemeal attempt at narrative formation onto the wall of my share house dining room. Who knew? Perhaps these news-articles plastered across fifteen or so square meters of collective space, sharing them with my house-mates and visitors, wrestling with an ever widening flow of information could provide a discursive medium for analysis, assimilation and a sense of appropriate and longed for action.

A few years later, economic rationalisation called for the broad-sheet to be miniaturized into tabloid format. I wasn't reading the paper as regularly by this time, but with each foray into print-news, something different seemed to be prodding me. I'm not sure if the contents of the news had changed or if I was picking up on themes that hadn't bothered me before. Actually "theme" is too strong a word, it was more like an undercurrent, mostly identifiable in the preoccupation of leading articles. It seemed to me that they were more about "rich" people, more about "powerful" people, more about "beautiful" people. What bothered me was the impression that these people who are being presented to us as apparently having 'made it', were the important ones, the ones that I should somehow fashion my dreams after, allowing their wealth and power and beauty to define what I consider important as I assess the world around me. In retrospect I wouldn't say that the focus on this self-important minority wasn't there before, or that the level of harping on their exploits had become any more shrill. I had just become more aware of their placement at the centre of our leading cultural narratives and had become more annoyed by it.

I was annoyed by the constant parading of the rich, powerful, beautiful -or RPB as I'll call them from hereon for brevity and to attempt dismissiveness- because they are so disconnected from my daily world, yet if I look at news they are constantly pushed into my world. Publicly they are afforded the role of the gods, as though their achievements are of the kind I should pursue or at least long for, while from what I can gather the majority of their private lives are a mess – very close to the Greek pantheon really. If I am interested to see what is going on in the world through any form of mass media I can expect to get a heavy dose

of the RPB, as though their exploits were newsworthy. A further point of annoyance was the realisation that the owners of the mainstream newspapers are amongst the richest and the power of their media voice ensures that their RPB buddies can hold the centre of the dominating narratives of our society.

I didn't actually write this to complain about the RPB though, or their society and the media magnate friends who project them into the news-sphere. So far I have just been peeling off a layer of dominating social narrative to begin to address the issue of telling the stories that really matter, telling the stories that will empower us, the common people. Not the stories: "you need more money", "you need more power", "you need more beauty" or such-like. If we want to participate in the story-making that will achieve the future to benefit all of us, meaning our personal benefit through the benefit of our communities and the benefit of the ecology we live within, it is the first step to name and reject the stories that don't help us achieve our actual needs. Stories with the RPB at the centre, the ones that disempower us and tell us there is nothing that we can do to change our society, community and environmental situation for the better, that we aren't good enough, that we need to wait for politicians and specialists to solve our problems or stars to bring sparkle to our dull lives are a wasteful distraction at

best, an insidious ruse at worst.

When we take hold of the stories that direct our lives, rewind, reformulate, renew, reinvigorate and revolutionise these narratives we will find freedom for our own minds and perhaps a new vigour for acting as a local community. We can prioritise community needs before corporate designs, we can prefer providing basic needs in broad active human solidarity over propping up the minority who govern corrupt financial institutions, we can demand political transparency and accountability, we can outline that on a finite planet esteem for nature and ecological regeneration must be prioritised over economic growth, we can bring to the front and centre the mystery of our unique consciousness and renew our search for its collective actualisation in a Universe where we may never know whether our species is but one of many or one of a kind.

To me, this short-list of narratives sound far more interesting than the pre-prepared, high in style but low in substance microwave dinner variety peddled to us by the main stream. We can actively participate in shaping the stories that will animate our pathway to a future where being human is being a positive, regenerative presence. Conscious, aware, empathic, active, creative, regenerative. Regenerative is quite possibly one of the most important words that will increasingly permeate our thinking, speaking and acting.

This is a "Transition" that in many ways is not optional. The constancy of change offers us many pathways, but a limited number of carefully chosen pathways will empower us to pass on to our Grandchildren and great-grandchildren a world that will continue to nurture them as it has us and our forbears. In these times the nature of the stories we live by is more important than ever, the narratives of the RPB are superfluous, the stories we tell ourselves and each other are of great consequence. The stories we circulate and live by in our communities must be the stories of the world we hope for.

Shoalhaven Transition is one group of local people who are actively engaged in collective story-making. Further, ST seeks to bring these stories into reality one step at a time. As one community group among many, Shoalhaven Transition would like to recognise the communities and individuals in the Shoalhaven who are already working to rebuild capital C -'Community' within their communities and working to reformulate the stories, narratives and ideas-that-we-work-within to shape the world we live in.

To access ideas and stories that intend to shape the future of a vibrant, connected Shoalhaven community and to build resilient local communities worldwide, take a look into:

<https://www.transitionnetwork.org/>

<http://shoalhaventransition.org/> ■

WE ALL STAND ON SACRED GROUND CELEBRATING NAIDOC 2015

NAIDOC Week (5 to 12 July 2015) celebrates the Aboriginal heritage of our ancient land and there are many opportunities to get involved.

This year's theme: ***We All Stand on Sacred Ground***, highlights the planet's oldest continuous culture and its timeless connection to the land: whether rivers or lakes, beaches, caves or mountains, sacred places have been used for countless generations as ceremonial sites, galleries and places for cultural practices and gatherings.

NAIDOC Week celebrations are held in locations across the country, with **Nowra Showground** hosting **NAIDOC** on **Wednesday 8 July**.

Aboriginal Rangers from the National Parks and Wildlife Service are participating NAIDOC events throughout the region as well as **visiting schools** and **community groups** between **June and August** to share stories of the sacred ground, its ancient landscape and first people.

For more information on how you can get involved, visit the NAIDOC website **www.naidoc.org.au** or contact the local NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service office **to find out about booking** a visit for your school or community group. **Phone 02 4423 2170**.

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"Small beer"

PAT THOMPSON

In the last edition of the NBT we welcomed the Transition movement to our pages. Transition is about living locally and is part of a world-wide movement of people concerned about the planet's future. Just ordinary folk doing things like growing a few home vegies which they believe will make a difference. Marvellous really that such simple undertakings can engender hope. Arguably here is an anecdote to counter our worst fears for living more simply is something we can all embrace and which can only lead to positive outcomes.

It is not of course the solution advocated by our leaders. The very idea of a mass movement of people choosing to slow down and generate less activity in the real economy is an anathema to their way of thinking. Still the signs are there that it is what is beginning to happen. Small beginnings but research supports that a significant percentage of Australian families are opting for less not more.

Just imagine a world in which

people chose smaller houses, smaller cars, smaller boats and less conspicuous consumption. A world in which people work less hours and spend more time with family and friends doing a variety of tasks that lead to a more balanced and enriched life. Heaven forbid, we can't have that! Without growth the real economy would collapse, mass unemployment and a depression would follow.

Talking with a professor recently from the Australian New Zealand School of Government (ANZOG), his view was that the world faces two great problems, namely population growth and sustainability; a reflection of his that I would largely agree but one which economist would appear to not have a clue on how to address. Anyway in proposing solutions I mentioned how it will prove interesting to see whether the NSW Government which is promising to introduce container deposits will cave into the pressure being applied by the beverage industries that are utterly opposed to this popular measure.

Predictably the professor responded to my solution as being

"small beer" which I suppose it was in the greater scheme of things. Interestingly the professor told me he works in Melbourne rather than Sydney where he lives. The reason he gave was that parking and traffic congestion made the Sydney office unsuitable. Typically his work involves conducting two to three week seminars to the Nation's brightest and most promising students – the ones charged with finding solutions to our planet's problems. I suppose the professor's decision to work from Melbourne made some sense both environmentally and economically – less commuting and larger tax deductions. Mind you with his busy schedule the professor did allude to not being able to find much time to spend down on his Kangaroo Valley farm.

All of which brings me back to transitioning and the real economy. Our leaders tell us that we need to double our population so we can triple our output if our future is to be any good. Something to reflect on I suppose like "small beer" if you happen to be making a home brew! ■

25-yr battle for the Bomaderry Creek Bushland won?

TERRY BARRATT

WELL, NOT REALLY, but there've been some great victories for the Shoalhaven community along the way. We won a court case against the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and the Shoalhaven City Council in 1993.

We formed a Landcare group in 1994 and produced a plan of management for the Bushland the same year. Over the subsequent years our bush regeneration work has brought great results and, although we still have much to do, our success has encouraged us to keep going. The group celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2014.

We produced a Bushland walks book in 2001 and lobbied the NSW state government to properly protect the Bushland which led to the establishment of the Bomaderry Creek Regional Park in 2002.

Another great outcome for the community took place in 2012 with approval for a link road around the northern edge of the Bushland. The alternative was to take it through the centre of this precious place threatening many rare plants and animals as well as the picnic area plus the walking track system. (That was a 25 year battle well and truly worth the effort).

A joint application to the NSW Environmental Trust by NPWS, Council and Bomaderry Creek Landcare for funding of

a 3-year project to bring the threatened Bomaderry Zieria back from the threat of extinction was successful this year. The trust is providing \$97,361 for the project over the 3-year period to 2018. This is a great outcome as the species is found only in the Bushland, which makes its recovery a very special responsibility for the Shoalhaven community.

So, why do I say the battle has not yet been won?

The outstanding biodiversity values of the Bushland are not guaranteed by the establishment of the regional park and the Zieria grant. After all, there are many more threatened species in the Bushland needing focussed management and the park only includes one third of the Bushland (some parts are still under the threat of urban development).

The best way for the battle to be won is for the whole Bushland to be included in the Regional Park. This will only happen if the Council hands over to the government the total area it owns and the remaining freehold land in the Bushland is purchased by the government.

A continuing commitment by the community to achieve a greater regional park is the key to winning the battle.

Give me a call on 4422 1211 or email me (terrybar@sctelco.net.au) if you want more information, would like to help or have any suggestions about our best way forward. ■

Bundanon Field Day

MARY PREECE

With two weeks rain preceding the May 2 event and significant rainfall on the day, Bundanon's first field day was held in weather that was not ideal for an outdoor event. Gerry Moore gave the welcome to country and his son Richard Scott-Moore sang in language, Mark Tucker welcomed the assembled crowd. In spite of the rainy day, those participating were able to enjoy the program and the sky cleared in the morning enabling Jason Carson from South East Local Land Services to lead a walk along Tree Lines Track and talk about the Living Landscape Project. The day would not have been possible without the support of our partners NSW National Parks and Wildlife Services. After a lunch supplied by Rabbit and Co Caterers, the marquee provided by NPWS, gave shelter from the rain and allowed the speakers from organisations such as Shoalhaven Reptile Club, Shoalhaven Bushcare, Office of Environment and Heritage, WIRES Wingecarribee, Friends of the Brush-tailed rock-wallaby and Rural Fire Service to communicate their contribution to the care of native wildlife and natural resource management. The value of this type of event is in strengthening relationships with these groups and giving them a platform to spread their word to a wider audience. A convivial BBQ was held at the end of the day and a few hardy campers stayed overnight. This will become an annual event. ■

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It's the Economy Stupid

JAMES MARIUS

ACCORDING TO MOST commentators the 2015/16 Federal Budget was an exercise in politics designed to save the Prime Minister rather than fix the economy and judging by the opinion polls it may have had some short term success. However, in the medium term Abbott is still left with the political problem of dealing with the eighty billion dollar shortfall for hospitals and education that is missing from forward estimates and he wants to foist upon the States.

Abbott has always been aware that this is his political challenge for the future. He laid the groundwork in last years Budget by foreshadowing that hospitals and education are really State matters and therefore not a Federal responsibility. In other words let the States deal with the Commonwealth deficit and it be their problem not his. Of course he gave them the solution too: Raise the GST. This half-clever sleight of hand if successful would go along way to fix the federal budget deficit and allow Abbott to leave the tax rort's that currently accrue to the wealthy untouched.

The Abbott/Hockey mantra is that they are a low-taxing government and they will do whatever it takes to fix the mess Labor is said to have left it. Labor on the other hand claims to have left the economy in pretty good shape following the GFC. The truth is both sides of politics get a fail when it comes to managing the economy as neither is willing to face up to the nation's long term structural problems.

Back in 1997 it was abundantly clear to all that Australia was on the cusp of another great mining boom. With China starting to grow at a phenomenal rate the demand for raw materials soon sent iron and coal prices soaring. So it was in this context that Costello contemplated Australia's economic future. With Government revenue set to sharply rise, the time was ripe for policy planning that would secure Australia's long term future.

In hindsight now it is easy to see that eight tax cuts delivered or promised by Howard/Costello were a tad too generous as was the \$40 billion in tax concessions for superannuation benefits for the wealthiest 20% of tax payers. These were the big ticket items on the revenue side of the budget. Coupled with this there was the further largess in middle class welfare with family tax benefits and baby bonuses, etc. What history will show is that the Howard/Costello years were a lost opportunity. Rather than invest in infrastructure and education the free spending Prime Minister and Treasurer created the problems Australia now faces. This is not merely my conclusion for in the words of the Treasury: "The structural budget balance deteriorated

from 2002-03, moving into structural deficit in 2006-07."

This was the legacy left by the Howard/Costello Government. Then in 2008 the GFC struck which sent shock waves around the World and sent government revenue's into free-fall. At the same time in response to ordinary people's savings going down the gurgler the new Labor Government stepped in with some good old fashioned Keynesian stimulus including cash handouts in the hope that people kept spending. It is part of history now that this worked and so Australia avoided recession when the rest of the World stumbled.

However, what Labor failed to do under Swan (World's best finance minister?) was address the Budget's structural imbalance. What Labor banked on was the expected revenue gains from the mining boom but they were never to materialise as by 2011 commodity prices began their sharp decline. Labor also made a hash of the Mining Resource Rent Tax and failed to convince the voters of the need for the Carbon Tax. In the mean time both sides of politics agreed to Gonski and the National Disability Scheme, big spending promises that future revenues no longer supported.

In the mean time the "dog days" have appeared. Today Australia does have serious economic problems. We have rising unemployment. Interest rates have fallen to such an extent that monetary policy is compromised. The Government has no vision beyond immediate political survival.

To make long term improvements to the Australian economy government needs to lead by setting policies that bring productivity gains. Governments aren't the economy. They depend on the economy so they can gain revenue to spend on defence, social welfare etc. But it is in the policy area of government that the economy is shaped. For example simple decisions that favour certain sectors of the economy may result in major shifts in investment which may bring significant shifts in productivity.

Productivity gains are not easy to achieve. To do so requires government policy that supports investment in productive infrastructure and human capital (education and science). This is NOT what the Abbott/Hockey budget or policy is flagging. In fact its policies are short-sighted ones. Its investment policies for infrastructure are mostly about urban roads of dubious productive value whilst its education policies are to lampoon science and technology: vis-a-vis solar and CSIRO research. It also seeks to avoid the responsibility for the extra funding needed for Gonski.

In Australia what we find is that government policies encourage over investment in residential housing. Whilst this

may be welcomed by the banks it results in less capital investment in more productive areas of the economy. Australia has the highest levels of household debt in the World but Australian corporate debt is low by international standards. Put simply in terms of productivity gains we are making the wrong investments and this more than anything is due to failure in government policy.

Australia is said to be the Lucky Country. Our country's prosperity relies on our primary wealth and is likely to continue to do so. Successful trade negotiations are a helpful sign. Gas reserves are considerable and remain to be exploited. Commodity prices should slowly recover although coal, in spite of what the Prime Minister says, has little future. With a

growing demand from a more prosperous Asia our agricultural exports will increase. A lower Australian dollar will help pay for our universities as for a time Asian students will continue filling the lecture halls and inbound tourism will also flourish. But none of this is new. What we are doing is simply charting the same old course.

With policy settings that favour high immigration; "growth" will continue but the consequences are that residential housing will remain under pressure and our cities will grow. A change in immigration policy is hardly likely to occur as that is what the banks and the other big corporates demand. Nor do governments of either political persuasion show any inclination to tamper with "negative gearing"

or capital gains tax which the Howard Government halved in 1999. These are the policies that the economist Saul Eslake says only encourage speculation, insure inflationary pressure on housing and increase indebtedness to which I would add are also the chief cause of Australia's low productivity and rising unemployment.

This then is Australia's future. A bigger Australia certainly but one with intractable urban congestion, low productivity, falling education standards, high unemployment and poor work participation rates. What ever happened to Bob Hawke's 1988 notion that we needed to become the "Clever County" and where is the vision? It certainly ain't with this government but hopefully might come with the next. ■

Kitchen Table Poets

KATE BROADHURST

NEXT TIME YOU order a coffee, talk to a teacher or visit your doctor, bear in mind that you might be in the presence of a poet doing their day job.

The South Coast is a hotbed of poets, with a surprising number of individuals and groups around the area devoting creative time and studious attention to their writing. One such group is The Kitchen Table Poets.

More than fifteen years ago a number of women attended a poetry workshop run by poet Chris Mansell. Finding they shared a passion for writing and reading poetry, they decided to form a group and meet on a regular basis to support each other as writers.

"We usually meet once a month or so and we try to bring along a new poem for others to comment on," Says Jenny Dickerson, a founding member of the group. "Sometimes people bring short stories, but mostly it's poetry. You bring a few copies to share around and we go around the group listening and offering critique."

"It's always useful constructive criticism," says Chere Le

Page – a visual artist who joined the group ten years ago. "I like the fact we can all talk to each other in a positive way – we're not there ripping each other's poems to bits, but there is honesty and trust, so we know we can say what we think."

There is a wide range of poetry in the group, but all the poets share a similar outlook and approach. Mostly they tend to write in 'free verse' – contemporary poetry that eschews traditional rules such as strict metre or rhyme.

"I used to write a bit of verse here and there, but I wasn't serious about the craft," says Colleen Duncan, a graphic designer and an original member of the group. "A poem could start from a feeling or an emotion, but that's just the beginning: it's about the language and rhythm and music."

Many of the writers are inspired by the natural beauty of the Shoalhaven. "I just love walking – that's when I stew up my ideas," says Irene Wilkie, another of the founding members. "I have a little notebook and if I have an idea while I'm out walking, I'll write it

down. There is so much beauty around here, sometimes it's almost too much."

On top of all this creative energy, the Kitchen Table Poets actively work to bring more poetry to the region, organising funding for well-known poets to come to the Shoalhaven to run workshops and masterclasses. The group also arranges regular public poetry readings.

The years of camaraderie and mutual support have reaped rewards. Many in the group have won or been shortlisted for national prizes and some have been selected for writers' residencies. Between them they've had numerous poems included in anthologies and magazines, and a couple of the poets have had collections published.

"We all get on together. We've had some beaut fights and always forgiven each other – we're like a bunch of sister," says Irene Wilkie. "We have fun when we get together. There's always a lot of cake and chat before we get down to the serious business of writing."

The author is a member of the Kitchen Table Poets.

www.kitchentablepoets.com.au ■

Pest (from the poem Legacy) by Alison Thompson

This morning it all seems very English in my garden	what with the overcast sky,
the chickens on the back lawn and the fox	who stared straight at me
through the kitchen window as I rose half-asleep	to see what had set the chickens off

And I, colonial to my bones, forgot he was more than the villain of fairytales forgot
he was vermin, feral, noxious not belonging to this land *destined to be culled*
and held my dog's collar as I held his gaze

He stood assured not even hungry	just checking things out
never doubting his right to belong	in this place in this time
and take what is offered to him	willing to adapt

Remembering the chickens I let the dog go but the fox was long gone
loping lazily up the hill to his home among eucalypt and lantana yet another new arrival
that has made its place here without asking without shame

And of the three of us	fox	lantana European	I wonder who
least understands this land	who has rendered the most harm		
who most deserves	the poison		