

Lake Macquarie Matters

Artwork by local Aboriginal artist Saretta Fielding. See story Pg4.

Our Covid recovery starts with you!

FIGHT BACK



Discover some of the great local businesses right here in the local area, such as Anthea who runs a hamper business out of Morisset using entirely local produce.

The past two years have been tough on many fronts, but they've again proven the value in sticking together, being a community and looking after each other.

Right now, as we hopefully head out of the pandemic and lockdowns, the best thing we can be doing for our local community is buying, dining and heading out locally.

While we have challenges ahead, the economic road to recovery will be a long one for many people, not just those who have lost jobs during the shutdowns, but the businesses who have struggled to stay afloat.

Employment growth in the local area fell by almost 7 per cent over the past year, and our current unemployment rate remains about 1 per cent higher than the State average at

6.7 per cent. Our youth unemployment rate is almost 16 per cent. Those rates are higher than neighbouring areas such as the Central Coast, Sydney and broader Hunter Region.

But we can do something about that. We can support businesses and create local jobs.

If you're planning a family get-together this Christmas or a work Christmas party, book at a local restaurant or club.

When you're out doing the Christmas shopping, stay local in places like Morisset, Cooranbong, Toronto, Cardiff and Warners Bay and discover some of the fantastic local businesses who not only keep your money local and create jobs, but sell extraordinary local produce and gifts. Please, do your bit and be part of our economic fightback!

Welcome

Hello and welcome to my final update of 2021. Here's hoping it's the last with updates on the Covid-19 situation.

It's been another extraordinary year, but I'm hoping you're now focused on spending some long-overdue time with your loved ones and friends over Christmas.

As we emerge from the Covid pandemic, we need to remember that a lot of people are still doing it very tough. Not just our frontline workers who have somehow managed to hold our health system together over the past two years, but also the workers who have lost jobs, the parents who have turned life upside down to home school their kids or prepare them for an HSC, and those who have actually lost loved ones to Covid-19.

We have some challenges ahead still, but if we've proved anything over the past two years it's that we live in a very lucky country, and in an extraordinary local community.

Thank you for all the support you have given each other.

Lyn and I would also like to wish you, your families and friends a very merry and safe Christmas.

We're feeling good about 2022, and we hope you are too!

Best regards,



■ On the road again



I have to thank a number of local organisations who answered my calls for help in buying a new delivery van for one of our busiest local charities.

As you know, Christine Mastello and her merry band of helpers at Southlakes Incorporated do an extraordinary job of assisting local people in need.

Until now, those volunteers have been using their own cars to deliver food hampers and assistance to where they're needed.

I'm pleased to say I was able to chip in and organise funding to purchase a new van with some extraordinary financial support from the ADRA Op-Shop at Morisset, Johnson Property Group and 8 at Trinity. LDV at Glendale also gave us a generous discount on the new LDV van.

Since the new van hit the road, Southlakes has been able to make an additional 150 deliveries to local families every week.

My thanks again to all concerned.

■ Battery plan on track



Origin Energy's plans to build a 700-megawatt energy storage battery at Eraring Power Station have moved to the next stage with Planning NSW.

The closure of the coal-fired power station at Eraring is now only 10 years away.

There will be enormous change in this sector over the next decade, but I'm really pleased to see Origin making massive investments on its Eraring site so it will continue to be a major player in the State's energy supply, and a significant local employer.

I've had a couple of recent meetings with Origin and they tell me that their commitment to the Eraring site, and transforming it into a power generator of the future remains.

The battery project, worth more than \$700m, is part of the company's "orderly transition away from coal" and will be vital to keeping capacity in the power grid as energy sources change.

Cooranbong bridge is finally a two-way street

Great to see a number of significant bridge projects finally completed or under way.

The frustrations for Cooranbong residents have finally eased after the council and Federal Government jointly contributed to get Cooranbong Bridge repaired and reopened. I understand it was a complex problem to

solve, but like everyone else I'm certainly happy to see the problem fixed and the bridge reopened.

Work is now well under way on the new Weir Road Bridge between Teralba and Barnsley. The council is managing construction and is co-funding the project with \$4.7m from the Federal Government. Gone will be the days when that road is closed every time it rains. The project is on schedule to be completed about the middle of next year.

Our Covid recovery



Having gone 364 consecutive days without any transmission of Covid-19 in the local area, things certainly changed in August.

Since my last newsletter, in which I dangerously gloated about our enviable record, we've had more than 1000 cases in the Lake Macquarie LGA, and more than 4000 in the Hunter-New England Health District. It's probably best that I don't make any bold statements this time around!

What has been incredible over that same period, however, is the vaccination level in the local area. Without doubt, it is the sole reason we are now preparing to have Christmas with our families and friends safely, and we are well on the way out of the Covid pandemic.

We now have more than 95% of Lake Macquarie people aged 16+ fully vaccinated. Our vaccination rate among 12-15 year-olds is

also approaching 90%. These rates are among the best in the world.

Having said that, we still have some challenges ahead, and that includes what will be a long economic recovery.

Covid-19 will be with us for some time yet, but with our high levels of vaccination, it will not pose the danger it once did and we will learn to live with it and manage it much better.

I also need to acknowledge all our frontline workers, our nurses, testers and tracers who have done an extraordinary job over the past 18 months, and even our supermarket workers and other essential industries which kept going through difficult times. Thank you.

I've compiled some local statistics below which you might find interesting, but please continue to be vigilant as the final restrictions are wound down over the next week.

COVID CASES, TESTS AND VAX RATES BY LOCAL POSTCODE

2259 (includes Wyee, Wyee Point, Wyong)
Population: 65,036
Total cases: 272
Total Tests: 154,954
Full vax rate: 95+%

2265 (includes Cooranbong, Martinsville)
Population: 6419
Total cases: 21
Total Tests: 15,186
Full vax rate: 95+%

2278 (includes Killingworth, Barnsley)
Population: 2690
Total cases: 15
Total Tests: 4879
Full vax rate: 95+%

2283 (includes Rathmines, Toronto)
Population: 24,099
Total cases: 130
Total Tests: 47,146
Full vax rate: 95+%

2285 (includes Cardiff South and Macquarie Hills)
Population: 32,974
Total cases: 201
Total Tests: 69,796
Full vax rate: 95+%

2264 (includes Morisset, Morisset Peninsula)
Population: 15,618
Total cases: 85
Total Tests: 33,874
Full vax rate: 95+%

2267 (includes Wangi)
Population: 2789
Total cases: 7
Total Tests: 5766
Full vax rate: 95+%

2282 (includes Lakelands, Warners Bay)
Population: 15,391
Total cases: 50
Total Tests: 32,374
Full vax rate: 95+%

2284 (includes Argenton, Boolaroo)
Population: 10,935
Total cases: 61
Total Tests: 24,530
Full vax rate: 95+%

2323 (includes Freemans Waterhole)
Population: 27,188
Total cases: 121
Total Tests: 48,448
Full vax rate: 95+%

(Figures provided by NSW Health and current at November 30. Vax rates apply to all people aged 15+. Case numbers for period March 2020-December 2021)

One final hurdle to ending the State of Suffering

Plans to allow voluntary assisted dying for people with a terminal illness in NSW cleared a major hurdle late last month when they were backed by a clear majority of the NSW Legislative Assembly.

The Bill has one final challenge ahead of it, and that's passing through the Legislative Council or 'upper house' when it's debated there in February.

Despite it being opposed by the Premier and Opposition Leader, the bill was supported in the lower house by 53 votes to 36 in a conscience vote.

As you know, I've campaigned on this issue for many years and I'm a co-sponsor of this bill.

I've been absolutely overwhelmed by the amount of support for this bill in the Lake Macquarie community. I'd put the level of support at more than 95%.



Having said that, I know there are people who remain opposed and I have appreciated the respectful conversations I've had with them.

Most often, those opponents talk about the need to provide more and better palliative care, and I couldn't agree more. We have some of the best palliative care services in the world in NSW and we should always be seeking to improve them, but there remains a percentage of people for whom palliative care can never provide for. Some people have terminal illnesses which provide dreadful and painful deaths, and they deserve the right to choose their end-of-life experience.

Our bill delivers that voluntary choice, it delivers robust safeguards and it allows for the conscientious objection of health workers.

Here's hoping it will be supported by the upper house and NSW can soon provide the same options for terminally ill people as those in every other Australian State.



Centennial dumps coal truck plan

I was really pleased to get a good outcome on Centennial Coal's plans to truck coal out of its Myuna Colliery by road to Eraring Power Station.

Centennial lodged plans last year to move more than a million tonnes of coal annually via Wangi and Awaba roads, leading to significant community opposition and a petition. I was particularly worried about the trucks coming out of the old Wangi Point Rd/Wangi Rd intersection which was previously closed because of the danger it created near a blind bend in the 90kmh zone.

In October, Centennial informed me they'd withdrawn the plans because hauling coal by road to Eraring was "now not required".

Having spoken to Centennial and the power station owner Origin Energy a number of times, I was happy they could find a better way of doing things.



Meanwhile, Origin has submitted plans for a major coal ash recycling facility at Eraring. This facility will have the capacity to recycle an additional 400,000 tonnes of coal ash every year, which means it won't be going into the controversial ash dam.

On the downside, it will put more trucks on Wangi Rd, but these will be the covered silo-type trucks which mostly serve the cement industry, and they'll be leaving and entering Eraring via the existing on- and off-ramps. Origin's application is still with Planning, but I'll keep you updated on any outcomes.

Greg Piper MP

More Dine & Discover vouchers on their way



The State Government is giving everyone another two Dine & Discover vouchers, each worth \$25. This brings the total number available to every adult to six. The two new vouchers are now available, so check your Service NSW app. If you don't use the app, simply log on to your Service NSW account and you can print the vouchers off, or call in to Service NSW at Toronto or Warners Bay and the staff there can do it for you. All of the vouchers, including those you have left over from last year, are valid until June 30 next year.

250 new jobs created by Costco at Boolaroo



After a delayed opening due to localised Covid outbreaks and restrictions, the new Costco at Boolaroo has opened. This is great news for the local area, and not just because it's created 250 new jobs which we desperately need at the moment. The development has been a huge investment in our area and is a vote of confidence in the remediated Pasminco site. It will draw thousands of people into the local area, and that's not just good for Costco, it's great for other local businesses as well.

Olympic Gold in Tokyo for local Will Ryan



The Lake Macquarie region has a long and proud history of producing some of the world's best sailors, and that continued in August when Coal Point's Will Ryan secured Olympic gold in Tokyo. Will sailed to victory in the men's 470 sailing class with team mate Matt Belcher. My congratulations again to the guys on their terrific win.

New boat ramp opens at Balcolyn



Great to see the new jetty and pontoon now open at Balcolyn. We were able to secure about \$132,000 in State funds for the jetty through the State's Boating Now fund, with Lake Macquarie City Council providing the remainder and managing the construction. We've done pretty well out of that fund, with major upgrades to Wangi and Speers Point jetties, along with a host of other smaller projects on our side of the lake. The 15-metre pontoon at Balcolyn is really well utilised and is a great example of what can be achieved by State-council partnerships.

Saretta's art creates cultural connection



The magnificent artwork pictured on the front page banner of my newsletter was produced by Saretta Fielding. As most of you know, Saretta is an extraordinary local artist. She's an Aboriginal woman from the Wonnarua Nation of the Upper Hunter Valley, now based locally. She's pictured with the original painting above and I was absolutely thrilled when she gave me a print of the work to hang in my Toronto office. The work is called 'Yarns Parai - Stories of Country' and it depicts Lake Macquarie in the south and Hexham Wetlands in the north. You can see more of her brilliant work at the Museum of Art and Culture at Booragul. Fantastic to have this sort of talent in the local area.

Contact

If you need help with any State Government matter, contact my office.

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Hours: Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm & 2pm-5pm

Phone: 4959 3200 Fax: 4950 4076

Email: lakemacquarie@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Greg Piper Independent Member for the State Electorate of Lake Macquarie

Hillsborough Rd upgrade on track but much more to do



It's been a long time coming but preliminary work has started on the upgrade of Hillsborough Rd.

As reported in my last newsletter, we were able to secure \$35m in State funds to widen the single-lane sections of Hillsborough Rd up to the Newcastle bypass, and install traffic lights at the Crockett St and Chadwick St intersections.

In September, initial ground testing work was carried out and while that was minor, it signalled the start of work on a project which has taken more than a decade to get moving. Of course, we know Hillsborough Rd is only one of many bottlenecks in the local area which need attention and I've raised these issues with the relevant Ministers.

At the top of the list is the Speers Point roundabout. Transport for NSW has done some preliminary design options to improve the intersection but that's as far as things have got. Traffic in that area is dreadful in peak times and we need some genuine commitment from the State to fix them.

Then there's what's known as the B53, the main road from Morisset through to Glendale. We have a number of pinch points along that road, including Morisset, Fennell Bay and Argenton.

They will be expensive fixes, but the growth in our local area demands that they be done soon. The next State Budget is only months away and I'm currently preparing new submissions for the Treasurer.

Community groups share \$400,000 in CBP grants

Almost two dozen local organisations shared a combined total of \$400,000 for improvements to their facilities under this year's Community Building Partnership (CBP) scheme.



Among this year's recipients are Biraban Local Aboriginal Land Council who received \$43,000 to provide disability access; Boolaroo-Speers Point Community Preschool which received \$30,000 to re-clad the kindergarten; Toronto Girl Guides who received \$21,999 to install solar panels on their hall; and Lake Macquarie Australian Football Club which received \$25,000 to update their kitchen and provide better disability access.

Also receiving grants were Cooranbong Community Services Centre, Filipino Society of Hunter Valley, Lake Macquarie City Football Club, Lake Macquarie Classic

Boat Association, Blackalls Park Preschool, Lake Macquarie Rowing Club, Morisset Rugby League Club, NovaCare, Dora Creek RFS, Rathmines Bowling Club (pictured), Rathmines Catalina Memorial Park Association, South Cardiff Football Club, Southlake Community Services, Speers Point Amateur Sailing Club, Teralba Amateur Sailing Club, Salvation Army (Westlakes and Norwest groups) and Wyee Hub.

A detailed list is available on my website.

Applications for next year's CBP grants will open early in the New Year. If your organisation is interested in applying, contact my office on 4959-3200 for more details.