

Lake Macquarie Matters

Early morning on Sugar Bay, Lake Macquarie. Photograph by Greg Piper

Resources for Regions win

The State Government has agreed to revise the criteria by which funding is allocated to mining-affected areas under the Resources for Regions scheme, which will boost Lake Macquarie's chances of securing much-deserved funding in next year's round of grants.

I made a number of representations on this issue when Lake Macquarie missed out on funding this year and am pleased that the Government has taken heed and revised its method of assessing the impact of mining on our communities.

Previously, areas with direct mining activity, such as Lake Macquarie, were assessed solely on the amount of royalty revenue per capita derived from mining but I argued that factors such as the impact of road and rail haulage, fallout from coal-fired power stations and future mining activity should also have been considered.

Responding to a question on the issue from me in Parliament on May 2, Deputy

Premier Andrew Stoner said the criteria would be adjusted next year to allow for wider consideration of all impacts of mining.

"Following representations from the Member for Lake Macquarie, next year consideration will be given to formulating an index that considers the combined impact of direct and indirect mining activity on a community," Mr Stoner said.

"Communities like Lake Macquarie that are impacted by mines as well as transport issues will have a great chance of securing funding in future years."

I am pleased the anomaly has been addressed and look forward to Lake Macquarie receiving its share of funding in the next round.

Victims finally have their day

The opening day in May of the NSW Commission of Inquiry into child sex abuse in the Catholic Church marked the end of a long road for the many courageous victims of abuse who have come forward and those who have advocated for justice.

I supported the call for a public inquiry, both in speeches to Parliament and an open letter to Premier Barry O'Farrell last year. Nothing will ever compensate those affected for the impact such abuse has had on their lives, but for many this inquiry, and the subsequent Royal Commission into institutional child abuse set up by the Federal Government, are important steps in healing.

I congratulate Detective Chief Inspector Peter Fox, *Newcastle Herald* journalist Joanne McCarthy, former police investigator Troy Grant (now the Member for Dubbo) and victims' advocate Peter Gogarty for their commitment, often in the face of strong and intimidating opposition, to bringing about these inquiries and allowing victims' voices to finally be heard.

Welcome



Welcome to my June newsletter. You will notice its new look, a style that will soon extend to my website, gregpiper1.com. The redesigned site will contain the same useful news and information but in a more contemporary and user-friendly format.

I also intend to launch a regular e-newsletter, so constituents can sign up to receive frequent updates on electorate matters.

The first half of the year has been an interesting time in State Parliament. I have been involved in many representations and negotiations on local issues, some featured in this newsletter, but also debate on broader community issues such as voluntary euthanasia and the saturation advertising of sports betting.

You can follow my activities on my website, Facebook and Twitter. I am always happy to hear from constituents on community matters and issues of concern. My office contact details appear on the back page.

Woman of the Year

It was a pleasure to attend the NSW Women of the Year Awards at Parliament House in March with Lake Macquarie Local Woman of the Year Jeanette Suttie.

The award is a fitting acknowledgement of the outstanding and selfless community work performed by Jeanette, particularly within the Indigenous community, who have embraced her as one of their own.

For more than 30 years Jeanette has volunteered huge amounts of time in very challenging roles, offering guidance and mentoring while demonstrating empathy, wisdom and diplomacy.

She works with schools and youth groups, women and families in crisis, Aboriginal support and advocacy networks and Indigenous men's groups.

She has been the friendly face and advisor to many children and their families undergoing the intimidating process of facing court proceedings at Worimi and plays a similar support role at Toronto Court. She also participates in the prison ministry Kairos Outside.

Jeanette, who is now in her 80s, does all of this from the goodness of her heart and with no expectation of reward.



Jeanette is truly one of the unsung heroes of the Lake Macquarie community and it was a privilege to nominate her in the 2013 NSW Women of the Year Awards and see her duly recognised.

Power plays

Along with our community, I have been vocal in opposing the privatisation of electricity assets and I support the current union campaign opposing the sale of the State's poles and wires.

During the last term, I argued forcefully against privatisation, believing it would lead to higher energy costs. The then Labor government sold the electricity retailers and the current government has now resolved to sell the generators, with the sale of Eraring Power Station imminent.

I have been making representations to government ministers about the Eraring sale and will continue to lobby for a process that will protect the jobs of those who work at the station and shield consumers from price rises.

I do not believe further privatisation of the electricity industry is in the best interests of the people of NSW. Independent polling by the unions showed 86 per cent of Hunter Valley respondents were against a sell-off of remaining assets.

If the transmission and distribution network – the 'poles and wires' – falls out of public hands, private interests will have complete control of the electricity network. As consumers, we cannot afford to give them that monopoly.

Honouring the Sunderland squadrons

I was one of more than 100 people who attended a moving ceremony on a sunny autumn morning at Rathmines Memorial Park to honour the airmen of two Sunderland squadrons that destroyed 13 German U-boats and played a pivotal role in World War II.

While many people automatically associate the RAAF flying boat base at Rathmines with Catalinas, the story of the Sunderlands and those who flew them is also an important chapter in the history of the base and the Allied war effort.

The Sunderlands flew anti-submarine patrols, escorted supply convoys and carried out sea rescues – perilous work that inflicted a high casualty rate. They operated largely in the Bay of Biscay and also in the north-western reaches of the Atlantic Ocean.

The ceremony in April was to officially unveil a memorial wall to late members of the 10 and 461 Sunderland Squadrons. There are currently 253 names on the wall.

The event included a marching of the colours and a flyover by an AP-3C Orion maritime patrol aircraft, as flown today by contemporary

servicemen of 10 Squadron, who are active in Iraq and Afghanistan.

I was honoured to have the opportunity to address the guests on the significance of the former RAAF site to our community.

Among the other speakers was the president of the NSW RAAF Association Sunderland Squadrons Branch, Peter Jensen, a 91-year-old who was a wartime wireless operator with the 461 Squadron.

He poignantly reminded those in attendance that the remains of many of his mates and flying colleagues lay scattered across the seabed in the Bay of Biscay and stressed the importance of having a cenotaph at Rathmines where the dwindling ranks of surviving airmen and the families of those who died could come to remember the fallen.

The new wall is the fourth at the memorial park dedicated to departed airmen from the former RAAF Rathmines base.

The walls are a tangible reminder of the selfless dedication of those who offered their lives in the service of our country.



At the commemoration with former 461 Squadron airman Peter Jensen, centre, and Air Commodore Stephen Osborne CSC, Commander Surveillance and Response Group.

Cash for the community

I was delighted to officiate recently at the opening of the first stage of the Macquarie Scorpions rugby league club's upgraded facilities at Lyall Peacock Field, Toronto.

The Scorpions received \$200,000 for a new amenities block from the Community Building Partnership program last year. Improvements completed so far include a new canteen and broadcast box.

The ground is a heavily used community asset and other sporting groups will also enjoy the benefits of the improved facilities, including the Toronto-Awaba Stags Soccer Club and competitors in the NSW Combined High Schools rugby league trials.

Community Building Partnership funding opportunities were reduced for 2012/13 following a restructure of the program but groups across the Lake Macquarie electorate nevertheless netted a total of \$200,000 for worthy community infrastructure projects.

This year's successful applicants were Catalina Players, Dooralong Community Reserve Trust, Filipino Australian Society

of the Hunter Valley, Lake Macquarie City Council, Lions Club of Toronto, Morisset PCYC, Newcastle Lake Macquarie Clay Target Club, Rathmines Tennis Club, Southlake Community Services, Teralba Amateur Sailing Club and Wangi District Workers Club.

Applications for grants under the 2013 funding round open on 19 June and close on 31 July. For more details, visit the website: www.communitybuildingpartnership.nsw.gov.au



Inspecting the new facilities with Macquarie Scorpions secretary Steve Woodbridge.

Trust captures a rare Cat

Congratulations to the Rathmines Catalina Memorial Park Trust on their recent purchase of a rare World War II-era Catalina amphibious aircraft.

The purchase has brought a step closer the long-held dream of having a museum located on the site of the former RAAF seaplane base at Rathmines.

It is planned that the disused PBV-5A Catalina will become a static exhibit within the proposed hangar-style museum, to complement the operational aircraft VH-CAT, which is currently being restored to flying condition in Sydney by the Catalina Flying Memorial group.

The plane bought by the Trust was sourced from Puerto Rico and – in a sign of the times – found on eBay. It is being dismantled and shipped to Australia, and we look forward to having it in Lake Macquarie soon.

Airport opposition

My office has received a lot of correspondence from people concerned about the inclusion within the Draft Wyong Local Environmental Plan 2012 of provision for a regional airport at Bushells Ridge, particularly after media reports linked it to a possible future bid for Sydney's second airport.

I made a submission recommending the airport zoning clause be removed from the draft LEP, arguing that such a significant proposal would be more appropriately dealt with under a state government planning instrument.

I also submitted questions to the Minister for Planning in Parliament and received written assurances that the Government did not support a second Sydney airport on the Central Coast and any airport application would be subject to thorough consultation.

Unfortunately, Wyong Shire Council has adopted their draft LEP without removing the proposed airport zoning.

The LEP will now go to the Department of Planning for consideration and final determination by the Minister.

Toronto road review

Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) has begun a planning study for the future widening of a 500-metre section of Cary Street, Toronto, between the The Boulevard and Bay Street. This is part of a continuing plan to upgrade the Wallsend to Morisset route and follows earlier improvements at Five Islands, Woodrising and Rathmines.

For further information on the planning study, visit the departmental website: www.rta.nsw.gov.au/roadprojects/ (click the 'Hunter region' then 'Wallsend to Morisset' links) or call project manager Philip Davidson on 02 4924 0332.

Electoral redistribution

The NSW Electoral Commission is undertaking a process to determine the redistribution of electoral boundaries.

Feedback from constituents in the southernmost parts of my electorate – around the Dooralong and Yarramalong valleys – suggests they feel stronger community ties to the Central Coast than Lake Macquarie, and in my submission I asked the commissioners to consider this in their review of boundaries.

The proposed new boundaries will be released for discussion later this year and a public inquiry undertaken.

For more information on the process, visit www.redistribution.nsw.gov.au or call 1300 135 736.

Mine back on agenda

The Environmental Impact Statement for the resurrected Wallarah 2 longwall mine proposal is on exhibition and open for public comment until June 21.

The original Wallarah 2 proposal was rejected in the final days of the former Labor Government. The applicant, Wyong Areas Coal Joint Venture, majority-owned by Korean Resources Corporation (KORES), wants to mine under the Yarramalong and Dooralong valleys for 28 years.

My overarching concern with this proposal is its potential impact on the aquifers, given the negative effects of longwall mining on groundwater in other areas. I urge concerned residents to read the EIS and make a submission. You can do so online: www.majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au

Garden of delight

The Southlakes Carers Sensory Garden at Morisset is a wonderful community facility built to enhance the lives of the elderly who attend the organisation's care centre in Dora Street.

The colourful, fragrant garden is open to others in the community to visit as well, and can be booked for gatherings such as small weddings, birthdays, christenings or anniversary parties.

The garden is tended by volunteers and Southlakes Carers welcomes any green thumbs, whether novice or expert, willing to offer a few hours working on the beds.

The garden opened last year and was funded by a community building grant that allowed the Carers to transform the enclosed grass area within their centre.

The garden looks beautiful day or night. If you would like to arrange a visit, volunteer to work in the garden or book a function, contact Vivienne Bruce on 4973 3855 (ext 1).



Contact

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

Address: 92 Victory Parade, Toronto 2238

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

Phone: 4959 3200 Fax: 4950 4076

Email: lakemacquarie@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Clearing the air

I have spoken through the media in recent months on the need for Lake Macquarie to have independent air pollution monitoring, to allay community concerns about air quality.



The National Pollutant Inventory, a Federal Government internet database, shows Lake Macquarie has among the State's highest emissions of nitrogen oxides, sulphur dioxides and particulate matter, pollutants that are considered to pose significant health risks.

Emissions in Lake Macquarie are measured by more than 20 industry monitors but the closest independent ambient air quality monitor operated by the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) is in Wyong. Newcastle, by comparison, is served by three EPA monitors, located at Wallsend, Beresfield and in the inner-city.

I raised this matter in a Question Without Notice to the Minister for Environment and Heritage, Robyn Parker, in the NSW Parliament in February. Many would disagree with the view that EPA monitors at Wyong and Newcastle are sufficient for assessing air pollution levels in Lake Macquarie. I will continue to lobby for our area to have independent monitoring.

There is a strong public perception that air pollutants in parts of Lake Macquarie are too high and pose legitimate health risks. Having an independent, government-operated air quality monitor would either verify this or help put the minds of residents of Lake Macquarie at ease.

Hospital fight not over

I will continue to lobby for the provision of sub-acute health services in the Morisset area despite the findings of a Hunter New England Health (HNEH) review that there is insufficient demand for a small hospital in the southern part of Lake Macquarie.

The findings were reported by the *Lakes Mail* in March and reiterated by the Health Minister, Jillian Skinner, in her response to a question from me in Parliament.

The Southlake Integrated Health Care Committee has done a wonderful job compiling statistics, reports and community feedback that provide a compelling argument in favour of a locally based facility

with inpatient capability to provide services such as cancer treatment, kidney dialysis, post-surgery rehabilitation and respite care, among others.

I have already opened discussions with the Minister on finding a way forward on this issue and will continue to liaise with her office and the community groups advocating for the hospital.



2013 Christmas Community Lunch

Christmas Day
(11.30am - 3pm)

For people who find themselves isolated or alone

Morisset Multi Purpose Centre
143 Dora Street, Morisset

Transport available by arrangement

RSVP and non-refundable cost of \$5 per person payable by 29th November

For more information call
Southlakes Carers on 4973 3855

Electricity rebates

If you received the Federal Government Family Tax Benefit A or B at any time during the 2011/12 financial year, you may be eligible for a \$75 rebate on your home energy costs. But be quick – families only have until June 14 to apply for reimbursement. For details, visit the website:

www.energy.nsw.gov.au/customers/rebates

Keep in touch

My office maintains a list of community groups and clubs to enable us to pass on information about grant programs and other relevant material. If your group's contact details have changed, please contact the office to update the information.