



Toronto Foreshore. Photograph by Greg Piper

Lake's field of dreams

Lake Macquarie is set to have a new world-class football complex by the end of next year, following the allocation of a State Government grant of more than \$7 million.

I was delighted to join Minister for the Hunter Mike Gallacher, fellow Hunter State MPs and Lake Macquarie Mayor Jodie Harrison at the September announcement of a \$7.3 million grant from the Hunter Infrastructure and Investment Fund to finance an \$11.3 million regional football centre at Speers Point.

The Lake Macquarie Regional Football Facility will house two international-standard synthetic football fields, 10 five-a-side synthetic football courts and the headquarters of Northern NSW Football.

The project is a partnership between Northern NSW Football, which initiated the proposal, Lake Macquarie City Council and Macquarie Football. I sought support for the project both as State Member and in my former role as Lake Macquarie mayor.



The state-of-the-art football centre will attract major events and top-line football teams to our region, as well as providing a fabulous community facility and furthering Speers Point's development as a sporting hub.

It is hoped the complex will be ready for both the International Children's Games next December and the Asian Cup in early 2015.

Welcome



It has been another busy year in NSW politics, with plenty of local and State-wide issues on the agenda.

Key electorate matters have included the ongoing campaigns for sewerage in Wyee and an inpatient health-care facility in the Southlakes, mine subsidence in Sugarloaf State Conservation Area and growing concerns about air quality.

At State level, I have contributed to debate on important issues such as the redrafting of planning laws, the reform of disability care under the NDIS and the sale of assets including Eraring Power Station and the Port of Newcastle.

Keep up to date with State and community issues by visiting my new-look website (see below), or following me on Facebook and Twitter.

Drop-off centre for problem waste



A new year-round disposal and recycling centre will help Lake Macquarie residents responsibly dispose of problem household waste such as batteries, old paint, oils, gas bottles, e-waste and mattresses.

I recently joined Environment Minister Robyn Parker, Charlestown MP Andrew Cornwell and Lake Macquarie City Council sustainability manager Alice Howe to announce a \$250,000 grant from the Environment Protection Authority towards establishing the community drop-off centre, which will be at the Awaba Waste Management Facility. It will open in the new year.

Visit my
new-look
website

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Sugarloaf remediation

I made a visit in late October to the site of the grout spill in the Sugarloaf State Conservation Area to inspect remediation work under way.

An attempt earlier this year to rehabilitate an area of the forest following major mine subsidence from West Wallsend Colliery resulted in an unintentional grout overflow that spilled 250 metres down a seasonal watercourse, creating something that looked like a concrete creek.

The damage caused by subsidence and the subsequent mismanaged rehabilitation attempt only came to public attention when reported by The Newcastle Herald. I visited the site with Herald journalists shortly after that report appeared, having not received any official notification of the incident.

The State Government has since established an inter-agency inquiry into the incident, which Premier Barry O'Farrell – in response to a question from me in the Parliament – has pledged to make public.



Inspecting remediation of the grout spill

The mining company, Glencore Xstrata, is responsible for the clean-up and is providing me with weekly updates.

Grout is being removed by hand and will be helicoptered out of the heavily forested area. It is a painstaking and expensive exercise but the work is being done with as little impact on the landscape as possible.

Keep TAFE strong

Are you concerned about changes to vocational education in NSW and the future of TAFE? If so, I invite you to attend a forum at Toronto on December 2.

The introduction of the Smart and Skilled vocational training framework from January 2015 will see increased emphasis on privatised education and a new fee system with subsidies based on skills shortages. There are fears this will result in higher fees, less choice for people in regional areas and a downgrading of TAFE.

It is estimated more than 84 per cent of students will face cost increases of between \$500 and \$1,500 to achieve their qualification. In a sign of things to come, subsidies were removed from the Fine Arts diploma this year, increasing the course fee to \$12,000, and course closures and staff reductions have already occurred at campuses across the Hunter.

The December 2 TAFE forum, co-hosted by the TAFE Community Alliance advocacy group, is at the Toronto Multi Purpose Centre in Thorne Street from 6pm to 8pm. For information about TAFE changes go to www.training.nsw.gov.au/smartandskilled.

RMS entry to reopen

Roads and Maritime Services is to reopen the rear access of its Toronto office to pedestrians, following successful representations to the Minister, Duncan Gay, by my office and the Toronto Chamber of Commerce.

The rear access was closed in 2012, forcing customers coming from Courthouse Lane and the shopping centre car park to take a 400-metre detour. Redevelopment plans for the back half of the RMS site would have seen the rear entry permanently closed but the RMS has agreed pedestrian access should be reinstated.

Meanwhile, there are a number of substantial road improvements under way in the electorate. The State Government will spend \$5 million to upgrade the intersection at Fairfax Road and The Esplanade, with work to begin next year. Work is proceeding on improvements at the intersection of Toronto Road and Enterprise Way at Woodrising, and the Government has committed \$1 million to preliminary works to upgrade the problem Cary Street stretch at Toronto, a project I have campaigned for over a long period.



'Felix' the Black Cat supporting the Rathmines Catalina Festival

Catalina Festival flies high

The Rathmines Catalina Festival on November 9 was another outstanding success, with thousands visiting the lakeside suburb to celebrate its rich wartime history.

Felix the 'Black Cat' was again the big attraction, but with a host of other aircraft on display, entertainment, market stalls and other amusements, there was plenty to see and do.

The annual event is a great showcase for Lake Macquarie and continues to be a vehicle to promote the campaign for a

hangar/museum to be built on the site of the old flying base.

It is an exciting time for those involved with the Catalina Coalition, with the purchase this year by Rathmines Catalina Memorial Park Trust of a disused PBY-5A aircraft in Puerto Rico. The old Cat will make a centrepiece static display for the planned museum.

Hail our local heroes

What a wonderful effort by our firefighters and emergency personnel in dealing with the devastating fires around Lake Macquarie in October.

Rural Fire Service crews from this electorate were in the thick of it and played a vital role in fighting the huge Rutley's Road fire, which travelled across 3,000 hectares of bushland to Catherine Hill Bay. Their selfless efforts contained what could have been a catastrophic loss of homes and property.

Members of the Peninsula Rural Fire Brigade, from Mirrabooka, steered the fire away from the iconic Catho Pub and also assisted in the attempted defence of historic Wallarah House which, unfortunately, was a casualty of the fire.

Our RFS crews do a fantastic job and deserve your support. I was pleased to recently join NRMA Toronto manager Christine



Handing over blue 'cat's eyes' to the Peninsula RFS

Gambrill and Peninsula Rural Fire Service Deputy Kristy-Lee Tenbosch (pictured) at the handover of an NRMA Community Grant of \$4,345 to buy blue 'cat's eyes'.

These road markers help the brigade locate roadside hydrants quickly in an emergency.

Christmas spirit

The annual Christmas Community Lunch hosted by Southlakes Carers is on again this year, thanks to the generosity of local people and organisations who have rallied with donations to ensure it will go ahead.

The lunch, at the Morisset Multi Purpose Centre on Christmas Day, is for people who are separated from family and friends. Places are still available. To find out more, or volunteer to help, call 4973 3855.

Tidy effort

Toronto Tidy Towns continues to do great work in our area and received three awards for its efforts at the NSW Sustainable Communities Awards, announced in Armidale in November.

Toronto won the Cultural Heritage Award for the Toronto NAIDOC celebrations, the Wildlife Corridors and Habitats Award for the Coal Point Threatened Species Last Stand project (in conjunction with Coal Point Progress Association and Landcare), and was the overall winner in its population category. Well done to all involved.

Fish friendly

Marmong Point Marina recently became one of the first in the state to be awarded 'Fish Friendly Marina' status.

The award, conferred by Fisheries NSW and the Marina Industries Association of Australia, recognises marinas that actively build or modify infrastructure to enhance fish habitat.

I was pleased to officiate at the presentation of the award to owner/managers Les Binkin and Symantha Suprain.



Boundary changes

The boundaries of Lake Macquarie and other electorates across NSW will change for the next election in March 2015, following a review and redistribution by the NSW Electoral Commission.

The new boundaries were announced in the NSW Gazette on September 19. The southern boundary of the Lake Macquarie electorate now aligns with the council boundary around Wyee, while new parts of Cardiff and Cardiff South have been added to the northern sector. The rural areas west of Wyong, including the Dooralong and Yarralong valleys, will move into the Wyong electorate.

You can find out more about the redistribution and view maps at www.redistribution.nsw.gov.au.

Housing upgrade

A redeveloped public housing block in Cohen Street, Speers Point, was opened by the Minister for Family and Community Services, Pru Goward, in September.

The block underwent a \$5 million upgrade, transforming the original 46 studio-style units into 32 more spacious, contemporary apartments better suited to long-term occupancy.

The new complex also has better accessibility and improved community areas. It is expected older people will move into the units, in turn freeing up larger homes for families on the waiting list.

Coal dust concerns

Are you affected by coal dust or other forms of air pollution?

I am lobbying the Minister for Environment and Heritage to have the Newcastle Particle Characterisation Study extended to include Lake Macquarie.

Lake Macquarie is the key coalmining area in the Lower Hunter. It receives fallout from two coal-fired power stations, 350 coal truck movements every day and numerous coal trains.

I would like to hear from local people who are affected by air pollution.

You can call my office on 4959 3200 or email your comments to lakemacquarie@parliament.nsw.gov.au.

Lovely Liesl sets sail



Sailability Toronto's new boat, Liesl, was given a good workout at its christening on October 20, with wind whipping across the bay.

The boat is named after the wonderful Liesl Tesch, an inspiring locally raised athlete who has won Paralympic medals in both basketball and sailing – most memorably at the last Games in London where she courageously raced to a gold medal only days after her mother's death from cancer.

I had the honour of meeting Liesl after she had steered the boat through its maiden voyage. Donated by Toronto Lions, the boat is fitted with equipment to enable sailing by use of head



movement for those with no use of limbs.

It is incredible to see the joy this organisation brings to people with disabilities, their families, and to the volunteers involved.

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

More money for schools

Public Schools in Lake Macquarie West will receive more than \$2.7 million in additional funding next year under the new Resource Allocation Model introduced in tandem with the national Gonski education reforms.



Meeting school leaders at Toronto High School

The State Government released 2014 funding figures for public schools in October, with schools in the electorate each receiving increases of up to \$250,000 on 2013 levels.

Four schools – Morisset High, Fennell Bay Public, Toronto Public and Dora Creek Public – received lower funding on paper than in 2013, but that was due to substantial one-off subsidies received last year that lifted their 2013 figures higher than normal.

In addition, Lake Macquarie High and Booragul Public School have received funding for a new security fence on their

shared site, with work to be completed by the middle of next year.

One of my more enjoyable jobs as an MP is to visit schools in the electorate. Recent visits have included Avondale School and Toronto High, where I had the pleasure of addressing senior students who listened attentively and were happy to throw me many intelligent questions about politics – as well as quite a few curly ones!

I look forward to visiting more schools in 2014 and receiving more grillings from students about politics and political life.

Seasons Greetings

My staff and I wish everyone a Merry Christmas, a safe restful holiday period and a happy, healthy New Year.

Our office will be closed from Christmas Eve and reopen on January 6.

Wyong Hospital late discharges

I recently raised in Parliament concerns about the ongoing problem of elderly patients from the Southlakes area being discharged from Wyong Hospital late at night without safe means of getting home.

This followed a string of complaints to my office, including an incident involving a vision-impaired 94-year-old woman who was told she could catch a train home to Bonnells Bay.

I have a letter from the Minister for Health, Jillian Skinner, that clearly states elderly patients should not be discharged between 8pm and 6am unless they have someone to care for them overnight and "appropriate safe transport home".

I have since met with representatives for the Minister, who have undertaken to investigate the matter and ensure this policy is observed.