

## **Bronwyn McIntyre**

Thank you to our MC, Cathy Crane President of Barwon Heads Primary School Council. We appreciate your help to us keep on track and your kind words of support. And thank you Sandy Gatehouse, your commitment, support and advice has been invaluable to us. And a huge thank you to Isaac and Alice for speaking so well about the things they love about the library.

My name is Bronwyn McIntyre and I am a resident of Barwon Heads. I'm one of 5 parents of young children who found ourselves running the Save Barwon Heads Community Library Facebook page and we have been working with a number of passionate individuals and community groups from Barwon Heads, on the broader campaign, including today's Rally. We have been connecting with residents of the Chilwell and Highton communities, who are also fighting the closure of their libraries.

I would like to give a huge welcome and thank you to all of you for coming here today to show your support to Save Barwon Heads Community library, and also the Chilwell and Highton Libraries.

I've never done this before and I find it absurd that a community should have to fight to retain a library. Like Gideon Haigh reported in the Age, there are lots of things that cities or towns can have too many of... Potholes. Feral cats. Or in here of Barwon Heads, Mosquitoes.....but too many Libraries? Really? I don't get it!

Libraries are wonderful places where people of all backgrounds, ages and abilities intersect and connect. Libraries keep us engaged and independent, they reduce isolation and nourish mental health and wellbeing. They get us out of the house, into the fresh air for a regular walk, they are a place for discussion, for story time, for homework and assignments, to read a paper, to pay a bill, to email a family member, keep in touch with what is happening in the world. They help our minds wander, create and imagine, help discover a new favourite book or author. They promote literacy, lifelong learning and a love of books. They let our children see people from all walks of life using and loving libraries and all that they offer.

In April, when we first read in the media that the 3 libraries were closing, they were due to close on 30 June, just 12 days from now. Within a week of this news, we had responded with such a level of outrage and concern that Council decided to extend the closure date of Barwon Heads Library to 30 September. A month later at the May Council Meeting, despite more than 6000 signatures on 3 petitions from Barwon Heads, Chilwell and Highton, over 200 emails and letters, more than 40 Council Question Time Submissions and 15 phone calls, the Administrators stuck to their decision to close our libraries, but extended the closure dates for Chilwell and Highton libraries to 30 September. If we had done nothing, if we had taken no action and just rolled over and accepted the original recommendation, our libraries would be closing in 12 days time. But, this is not happening and this shows the impact that we can make when we work together to fight for something we value.

Congratulations to every person who has taken action, big or small, on this issue. Power to the people!

Last Tuesday, our group submitted a detailed formal report to Council Administrators to request that they change their decision and keep our libraries open. This request was supported by 17 Barwon Heads community groups and clubs. Thank you to all of those groups for getting behind us.

In summary, the concerns that we raised in our submission were

1. Firstly, that there was no community engagement or consultation before making this decision. We deserve better.
2. Second, the decision to close the libraries was based on poor quality data and poor analysis. By comparing our Community Library model with Branch Libraries, they are comparing apples with oranges. The measures used by the Geelong Regional Library Corporation are outdated and inconsistent with current Australian Library Standards. They don't measure the true social value of libraries to people in our communities. They only measure outputs, like numbers of loans, for example.
3. Another concern is that Council have not looked at the alignment of our library service with their own strategies and vision for communities which are connected, prosperous, creative, sustainable, resilient and designed for people. The Barwon Heads community relates to this vision and our library contributes to this.
4. Finally, Council and the Library Corporation have not taken accountability for the service level of our Library, instead preferring to blame us, the community, for "under-utilising it". They have shown a lack of commitment to genuinely work with our willing community. They have not recognised the real opportunity that our Community Library model presents. Being based within the school building, it requires no capital investment or maintenance by Council. At an annual cost of just \$58,000 it delivers outstanding value for money compared to others in the municipality. It costs less than 1% of the annual rates collected by Council from Barwon Heads residents. This highly cost-effective model should be enhanced and replicated, not eradicated.

So in our submission to the Council Administrators, we recommended they:

- Immediately change their decision to close our library and include funding in the coming budget, to keep our library open.
- Acknowledge that Community Engagement is needed before making a closure decision and ensure this happens in the future, with consideration of all community impacts.
- Review and update the Library Corporation's Key Performance Indicators, to reflect current Australian library standards and ensure that performance is monitored, measured and reported in a transparent and consistent manner.
- Engage and work with our community via a Library Reference Group to enhance the service of Barwon Heads Library to reach its potential
- Use our library as a location for Community Consultation and information sharing.
- Develop a 3 year plan for a Performance Review of all Geelong Council Library services against the new performance indicators,

These are the recommendations that we submitted to Council last Tuesday.

Well, now, the tide has turned. 2 days ago, on Friday, the Council published the agenda for the next Council meeting, on 27 June. In it, is a report with a new set of recommendations, including the recommendation to keep our 3 libraries open.

Yes, our voices have been heard, we are finally being listened to. This is an important message for everyone, and especially for our children, that we have to fight for things that are important, and that we can work hard, work together and speak up to make a difference.

Now, we need to keep our voices heard over the next couple of weeks to send a clear message to the Administrators that the right decision is to vote to keep our libraries open. The Administrators; Peter Dorling, Laurinda Gardener and Kathy Alexander have the opportunity to restore the faith of the community, in Council. This decision would show that they have heard and genuinely considered our views, and that they are making an appropriate decision in the long-term interests of the community, to deliver positive social outcomes for current and future generations.

If, on 27 June, they vote to keep our libraries open, we as a community, need to recognise that this is just the beginning. We need to work with the Council and the Library Corporation to make sure that changes occur so that our library can survive future reviews and remain open for the long term. We do not want to again face the closure of our library on 30 June next year.

So, we are committed to the fight to Save Our Libraries, but we need your help, your input and your actions.

Please:

- Follow us on FB at Save Barwon Heads Community Library
- Please make sure every member of your family is registered as a member at Barwon Heads Library (or Chilwell or Highton if this is your library) and check this – don't assume! The data tells us that there are many Barwon Heads Residents registered to other libraries within the network.
- We need to use our library – it is still open and if we value it, we need to use it.
- It is so important that before you leave today you write down your suggestions for our library and ideas on changes to hours or services that would mean that you could use the library more. You can make suggestions over there today, and we will arrange a suggestions box to be placed somewhere around town, so keep an eye out for details in Talking Heads or on our Facebook page.
- Please come to the next Council meeting at City Hall at 6.15pm on Tuesday 27th June. This is where the decision on our libraries will be made and we need big numbers there, kids can come to – the more the merrier!
- We have all of the above on a flyer – take a photo of it before you go today so you remember how you can help. If you don't have a camera on your phone, grab a flyer.

Congratulations to our communities on the commitment that has been shown and amazing progress that has been made. And again, thank you so much for your support to Save Our Libraries.