

# Barwon Heads Association Inc.

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## BHA ANNUAL REPORT 2019-2020

What a strange year we have all faced together. We have all learned to ZOOM and have really missed our normal catch ups and face to face meetings.

The BHA Committee has continued to meet on a regular basis and many projects have continued during the COVID shut down, but we don't feel we have slowed down. Ironically we have had access to a range of people via ZOOM or other electronic means that we might not have been able to meet in person. Our attempts to have monthly ZOOM meetings with members met with a luke warm response – this is no different to our face to face meetings. Despite this we have maintained good membership numbers and are getting very warm feedback from our members. Succession planning is the topic for the rest of 2020 into 2021.

It has been another great team effort. In particular a big thank you to:

- The Barwon Heads Community
- Our loyal members and welcome to all our new members and supporters
- Our very generous donors
- Talking Heads, Trish has been so very generous, supportive and encouraging. Our page 3 continues to be our main mechanism for communicating with the town and our visitors. Trish has developed a very effective online magazine, which we encourage everyone to download. It will be on our website
- A wonderful Committee, who all come when asked and participated in a broad range of community activities throughout the Bellarine
- The Combined Bellarine Residents Association and in particular Phil Edwards the inaugural chair
- Our very busy member for the Bellarine Lisa Neville
- Our new member for Corangamite Libby Cocker
- Our Bellarine Councillors Stephanie Asher, Trent Sullivan and Jim Mason, who have all been re-elected, Interestingly we now have Cr Asher as the Mayor and Cr Sullivan as her deputy.

## HIGHLIGHTS

### Being part of the Bellarine

The BHA continues to be a strong supporter of the Combined Bellarine Community Associations (CBCA). Colin Bridges and I have been the BHA representatives this year. This group has continued to develop in 2019/2020 and has now met bi-monthly for more than 3 years. Each association has nominated representatives to attend these meetings. The role of Chairperson has rotated. This year we developed a formal MOU between members and Phil Edwards from Ocean Grove has been an outstanding inaugural chairperson. We thank him, Chris Kelly from Portarlington who has been a very efficient Secretary and Laurie Muscat from Point Lonsdale for his energy and IT support.

The CBCA submission to the Bellarine Distinctive Areas & Landscape project (Bellarine DAL) and the recent Webinars for the City of Greater Geelong local government elections have been highlights and shown the strength of the CBCA team. Our community groups

are ill equipped to continually stand up to the significant legal assault funded by landowners to develop everything everywhere as separate entities, but are strengthened in this larger group which seems aligned on important planning matters.

The Chair role will be rotated for the next 6 months. We look forward to working with the next Chair Professor Lawrence St Leger from the Breamlea Association.

We also continue to work closely with the Ocean Grove Community Association and have developed closer working relationships with the Point Lonsdale Civic Association. We are all talking about the same thing – over development and failure to plan properly for the impacts of growth on fragile coastal villages.

We are represented by Geoffrey Waite on the Community Safety Networks – Greater Geelong and Bellarine.

### **The City of Greater Geelong**

We welcome the return of our three Bellarine Ward Councillors Stephanie Asher, Jim Mason & Trent Sullivan in November 2020. Our Councillors have always been available and willing to talk. They work well together and have diverse backgrounds. We continue to support multi councillor wards, however the changes in the Local Government Act 2020 mandate single member wards for all Victorian Councils from 2024. We believe that our community has experienced an improvement in local government by councillors who have demonstrated a cooperative shared responsibility with the ability to provide mutual support for the overall benefit of the community.

The municipality has a population of over 252,000 and this is expected to increase to more than 393,000 by 2041. There are a number of policies and strategies that are evolving which are difficult to follow, it always seems that the Council is very reactive and focused on micro issues. Significant submissions were made relating to the environment and transparency.

**Environment** - We made a submission to the disappointing draft Environmental Strategy 2020-2030 (the Strategy) in June 2020. We noted and supported the purpose of the Strategy to define and communicate how the City will protect and improve our regions environment. However we are particularly concerned about the relevance of the Strategy to the Bellarine and Barwon Heads and whether it will be a useful source of policy and protections. We are interested in where it fits in the overall maze of legislation and policy and whether it has any relevance to the decisions that are being made in relation to development and growth. The Bellarine Peninsula Distinctive Area and Landscape (DAL) Statement of Planning Policy (SPP) highlights a focus on protecting the Bellarine. We would expect that Council takes the opportunity the DAL presents to further protect this important part of CoGG territory.

**Transparency** - We made a submission to the City of Greater Geelong Draft Transparency Policy in August 2020. We note that the Local Government Act 2020 was passed by the Victorian Parliament in March 2020, replacing the Local Government Act 1989. We are concerned by many of these changes; however strongly support the requirement for the City of Greater Geelong to be more transparent in its decision-making. The lack of transparency by CoGG on building and planning decisions in Barwon Heads has caused significant angst in the community and has cost the Council significant time & resources to support the process. The Council should not be able to hide behind privacy legislation and require ratepayers to use FOI to access information. We strongly support the establishment of a public register to record meetings between property developers, council management, senior officers and Councillors and expect that Council enforcement activities are recorded in a public register with the reasons for the decision and be made available to the public.

### **Water Quality in the Barwon River**

This continues to be a major challenge. Our local member Lisa Neville is the Minister for Water; she has been kept well-informed and provided support and encouragement.

**Barwon River Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC)** - The Association has participated in the Barwon River MAC process and made a submission to the MAC on the 6th November 2019. We are involved because of the lack of real accountability for the health of the River and the continual buck passing that we continue to witness. We understand that the MAC recommendations were submitted to Government in December 2019 and note that the Barwon Action Plan is due to be developed and released by late 2020. We

continue to participate in good faith and have had constructive discussions with senior people from DEWLP about the ensuring alignment between the MAC process and the Bellarine DAL. We have been very vocal to ensure that beauraucratic processes don't cancel each other out.

The Bellarine DAL provides a wonderful opportunity to align the Planning legislation with the Marine and Coastal legislation. We see a real threat if the MAC is not released in a timely manner to co-ordinate with the DAL.

**The Barwon Estuary Public Health Water Quality Monitoring Project** – we did not get funding for this very special project last year, however we are currently lobbying for its reinstatement and fail to understand why it is not a priority of Government and the Council. Our goal is to have an ongoing and integrated water quality-monitoring program of the Barwon River, its estuary and local beaches established with ready community access to the monitoring data and reporting of expected future conditions. The monitoring would focus on public health indicators for recreational uses and provide a publicly available Beach Report - Water Quality Forecast as is already available for 36 beaches in Port Phillip Bay.

**Sparrowvale** – the new wetlands at Warrily are to be developed by Council over the next 50 years to capture the urban storm water runoff from the Armstrong Creek area and provide a 500 hectare public parklands and nature reserve. We have supported and participated in the public consultation process and the presentation of this project was one of the most interesting we have had.

### **Planning**

Planning continues to be a major challenge for Barwon Heads residents and the BHA. This will remain a significant challenge without the proper recognition of the frailty of our location. Where are the best practice guidelines for coastal development? Where is innovation recognised and encouraged? Why aren't the community valued and referred to as major stakeholders rather than the bureaucrats fixated with permitting housing and development anywhere. The failures to protect vegetation and provide adequate parking continue to grow as significant issues. We have been putting in objections to applications that set poor precedents and threaten the coastal village amenity however we are ill equipped to continually stand up to the significant legal assault funded by developers.

**Planning and Environment Act 1987** - The Barwon Heads Structure Plan 2017 came into operation on the 15th July 2019. The Western town boundary has been maintained, but a substantial part of central Barwon Heads now permits a greater density and height of development.

**Distinctive Areas and Landscapes: Bellarine Peninsula (The DAL)** - This project is now entering its third year and is being led by DELWP in collaboration with the City of Greater Geelong, the Borough of Queenscliffe and the Wadawurrung People. The DAL process has been delayed by the COVID19 pandemic. We expect the Government to honor its election commitment in September 2018 and establish permanent settlement boundaries and control development on the Bellarine. The Combined Bellarine Community Associations are strongly advocating that the Minister for Planning & DELWP deliver on the Government's promises to permanently protect the Bellarine towns from any further inappropriate outward urban sprawl.

**Developments in Hitchcock Ave** - we are now witnessing the completion of significant developments in Hitchcock Ave. It is very apparent there is no design overlay for this very important precinct. The new developments might be functional, but there is no design symmetry or streetscape improvement. Parking is limited and tight. All were granted waivers of parking. We cannot understand why this is so easy, and wonder where people are meant to park other than in residential streets. Waivers are all granted at no cost to the benefit of developers and the disadvantage to local residents and existing businesses. There is limited bicycle parking and the driveway access to most developments in Hitchcock Ave across the footpath have a negative impact on the pedestrian movements and can be quite dangerous. Trees are all removed and buildings built to the footpath ensure there is no real vegetation.

**Development Applications** - We have seen the end of 2 major planning marathons – hopefully they will now proceed as per the permits granted.

**1 Flinders Pde** – a permit has been granted for partial demolition, alteration and additions to the heritage café and a 3-lot subdivision of the land, which will permit the future construction of 2 new 3-story dwellings.

**4 Bridge Rd** – following Councils refusal to grant a planning permit for the 2 level dwelling into 2 separate dwellings VCAT directed that a permit be granted subject to conditions relating to screening the windows and the preparation of a landscape plan.

#### **Traffic & Pedestrian Safety**

The BHA Parking & Traffic Sub-Committee meets three times year. As well as our Committee members, we have representatives from Regional Roads Victoria, the City of Geelong, traders including the IGA and the hotel, BH Cycling Club, the BH Primary School and the Ocean Grove Community Association as an observer.

Council allocated \$80,000 in its 2019-2020 budget for the Barwon Heads 2019/20 traffic and parking study. The Association has played a significant role in this project, which commenced in May. Our submission dated 14th June is on our website. Council is now consulting again on their interpretation of the results of the consultation. We are concerned that this intense consultation doesn't result in a net result of no further action required.

The BHA's submission to Council of 14 June was a very detailed document and describes the causes of issues as well as opportunities. The submission also identifies strategic issues as well as point specific concerns (which appeared to be the focus of the first round of community engagement). We wait with interest the outcome of this consultation.

#### **The Barwon Heads Library**

We are very proud that our Library continues to grow and is now a role model for other small community libraries. The Friends of the Barwon Heads Community Library continues to support the library with the support and encouragement of the BHA. It has hosted 3 writers workshops led by local author Dorothy Johnson and with strong community and school support and its very effective advocacy with the Library Corporation has resulted in an extension of 3 opening hours each week. Thank you to Karen Firth and her committee for their time and energy. Thank you to BHPS Principal Daniel Vella for his interest and availability. Hopefully our library is now safe from bureaucratic processes and modelling.

#### **Barwon Heads Arts and Community Hub**

The Barwon Heads Association and the Barwon Heads Arts Council in consultation with the Barwon Heads Senior Citizens have been working very hard to deliver this facility for the Barwon Heads and Bellarine community.

We have been working together and lobbying for a community space in Barwon Heads since 2013. In 2014, a petition gathered 932 signatures supporting the transition of the soon to be vacant kindergarten into a community hub. During the 2018 election, Minister Lisa Neville pledged \$1m to the community to redevelop the kindergarten site. This project is funded through Regional Development Victoria and has been paid directly to the City of Greater Geelong.

We are members of the Project Reference Group and are about to sign off on final designs, which will be advertised as part of the planning process in November.

Thank you Lisa Neville for the funding. This has been slow but is now looking like it will happen and building will start before April 2021.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We continue to share close relationships with other community groups. In particular the Barwon Heads Arts Council; Save Barwon Heads Alliance; the Barwon Heads Senior Citizens (for friendship & the use of their facility) and the Ocean Grove Community Association. We also have strong working relationships with Barwon Coast and the City of Greater Geelong.

I thank all of the Committee for their efforts this year:

- Our 2 Vice-Presidents who have taken a lot of the load from me and their input and advice has been wonderful
  - o John Nolan has been a significant contributor especially relating to the Bellarine DAL, all water and storm water matters, planning and he chairs our traffic and parking sub-committee which has had a very busy year
  - o Heather McCarthy joined the Committee last year. She was passionate about recycling and made a significant contribution on so many things. Heather resigned during the year due to family commitments, we miss her.
- Geoffrey Waite for keeping the purse and membership records and representing the BHA at the Bellarine Safety Group
- Colin Bridges as Secretary has been a significant support on all planning matters. Colin has also been a representative on the CBCA with me, and on the Arts & Community Hub working group.
- Sarah Jackson provides support, strong connections with the community and sends out all mail outs to members
- Richard Hastings continues his passion for the history of Barwon Heads and continued understanding in and involvement with the providers of public transport on the Bellarine. He is resigning from the Committee after more than 10 years. Thank you Richard we will miss you, but expect you to stay involved. We wish you well.
- Karen Firth has strong community connections and interest in the community and equity. We rely on her IT skills to manage our website. She is the Chair of the Friends of the Barwon Heads Community Library Committee
- Gabrielle Nagle has been on the Committee for 5 years now and continues to make a strong contribution. She is coming back as a Vice President.
- Philip Bade continues to provide his input into planning and community matters and we value his advice.
- Brian Cook has strong IT skills, is very well connected to the Scouts. He contributes to all projects and we really value his participation

We thank all of our elected representatives who have all been very supportive:

- Lisa Neville our local Member of Parliament who is always available and interested in anything we contact her about. We acknowledge her role in the State Government, which is extraordinary
- Libby Cocker is our member for Corangamite has been very supportive of the community in a very hard year.
- Sarah Henderson our local resident is now a Senator for Victoria and very visible in Barwon Heads, giving locals a chance to talk to her about things that matter to the local community.
- Bellarine Councillors Stephanie Asher who was a very successful Mayor of Geelong and recently reappointed for a second Mayoral term, Trent Sullivan the new Deputy Mayor and Jim Mason

We also value the ongoing support from Gary McPike the CEO of Barwon Coast.

Sandra Gatehouse

President Barwon Heads Association 2019-2020