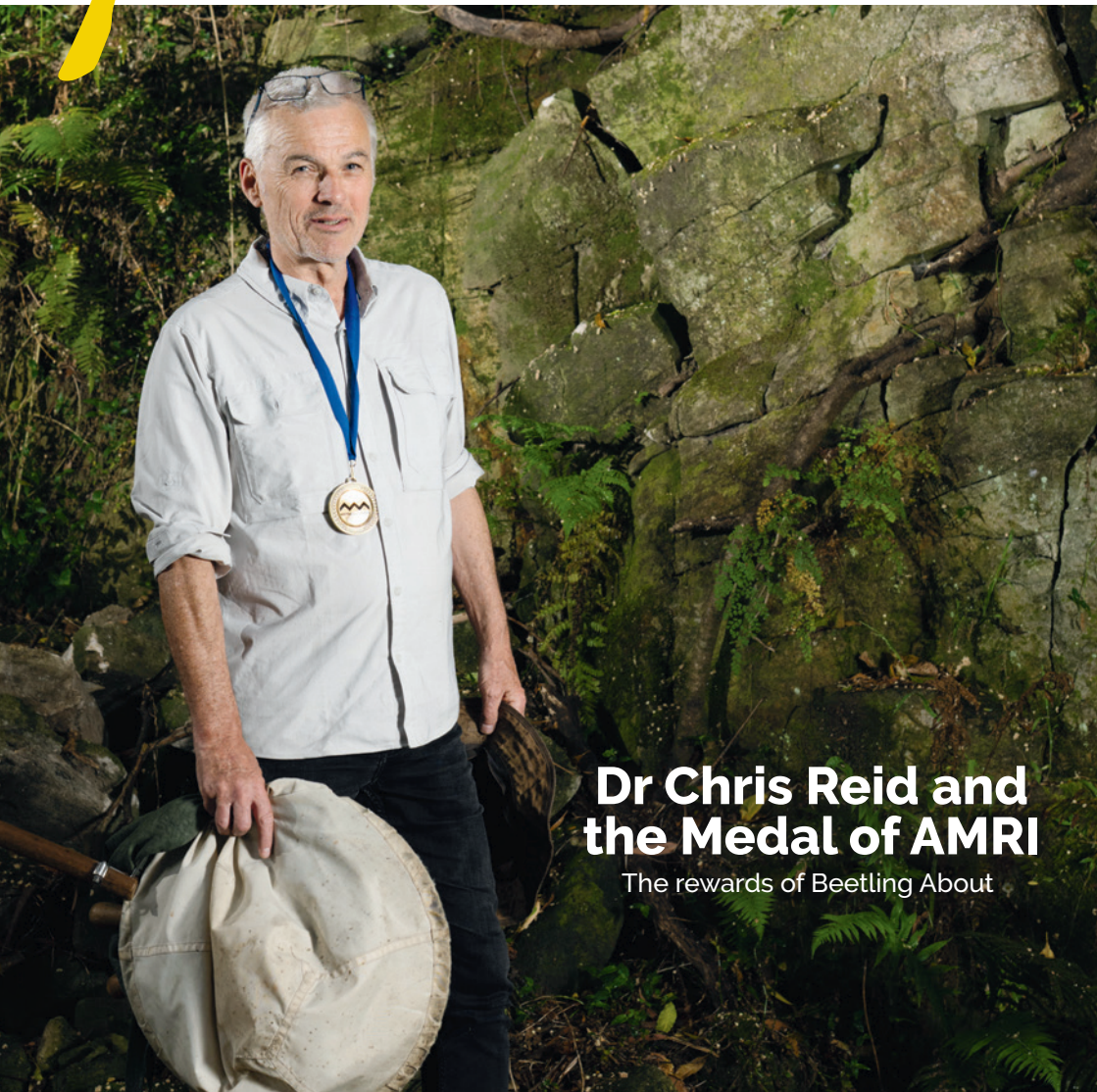


THE ILLAWARRA *flame*

December 2025



Keeping community news alive



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THE ILLAWARRA *flame*

**NEXT
DEADLINE
10 Dec
for Jan
edition**

EDITORS Genevieve Swart, Marcus Craft

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COVER Dr Chris Reid at Helensburgh Glowworm Tunnel. Photo: Anthony Warry

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12 Hours 'Til Christmas

By Lauren Mitsak of Stanwell Park Arts Theatre (SPAT)

I have it on good authority that this year's Panto, *12 Hours 'til Christmas*, is shaping up to be extra special. The singing, dancing and acting by the 32 cast members, along with musical director Catherine Rostrum's piano accompaniment are all fantastic! So too are the wonderfully creative costumes, and backdrops. We are very proud of our members, Christine Higgins and Rachael Kiddier for penning such a wonderful script and for father-daughter duo, Tom and Katie Peach, for their insightful direction.

Five performances will be held on Saturday December 6 at 7:30pm, Sunday 7th at 2:30pm, Friday 12th at 7:30pm, Saturday 13th at 7:30pm and Sunday 14th at 2:30pm. Tickets are \$20 for adults, children and SPAT members \$10, family (2 adults and up to 3 children) \$50 and children under 5 – free. To avoid missing out, it is important to book early. Go to www.spat.org.au

Playmates Illawarra

We are very proud to announce that SPAT won this year's Playmates competition. Well done to the team! Next year Roo Theatre will be hosting Playmates and we will need a team for 2026. If you're interested in participating in this, let us know and we will get in touch with you prior to the performance date next year.

SPAT Singers

Instead of winding down for the end of the year, the SPAT singers are winding up for an hour-long Christmas performance to the over 100 residents at Kirrawee Retirement Village. Our multi-talented

director, Lindy Sharp, is dusting off traditional Christmas Carols and introducing us to beautiful new ones to perform at this concert, including those that require audience participation. We are delighted that this is the third year we have been invited to perform there.

Panto tickets at www.spat.org.au ✨



The annual pantomime opens on Saturday, December 6 at the CWA hall



Glad tidings of Operation Art

By Nina Sampson, Year 1 teacher at Helensburgh Public School

Helensburgh Public School is thrilled by the outstanding achievements of our talented students in the Operation Art 2025 Exhibition. This prestigious program showcases young artists from across New South Wales, with selected

works displayed at the Art Gallery of NSW and regional galleries before becoming part of permanent hospital collections.

This year, two of our students, Olivia D (Fruitful) and Kiara W (Flora of our school), were chosen in the highly regarded 'Hospital 50' category. Their artworks will not only be exhibited but will also become part of the Children's Hospital at Westmead's permanent collection, bringing joy and inspiration to patients and families for years to come.

We also extend our congratulations to Zach D (Friends between the trees), whose work was selected in the 'ArtBank' category. ✨



Merry & Christmas

Wishing everyone a very Merry Christmas & a happy & healthy 2026.

As twinkling lights fill our homes and hearts, we celebrate the joys of family, friendship, and the spirit of giving. May this season bring peace and happiness to you and your loved ones.

We sincerely thank you for your continued support and trust. Your generosity toward the SAHSSI Annual Gift Drive has made a real difference and brightened many lives.

From our families to yours, we wish you a Merry Christmas and a happy, prosperous new year filled with joy and hope.



Christmas Wishes

Julie York

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Double the fundraiser

The annual Little Ray of Giving initiative is set to support more families across the region as Ray White Helensburgh expands to Thirroul



A third-generation family business founded in Helensburgh 53 years ago is expanding. Ray White Helensburgh recently acquired the Thirroul branch, and there are big plans for 2025.

"We've always tried to ensure that we maintained its 'people first' approach that was the key to the success and longevity," says Ray White Principal Mattias Samuelsson.

The grandson of founders Ken and Patricia McCarthy, Mattias has led the business for the past seven years and is putting his own imprint on the local property market, with many headline-grabbing results along the coastline.

A Welcome Addition in Thirroul

"My goal, in expanding our operations to Thirroul, is to create a real estate business that is a part of the local community," Mattias says.

"In the coming months and years, I am aiming to build a team, comprised of genuine local people, whose ethics align with my key principles: 'work hard and do right by people'. We're encouraging anyone who would like to be part of this project to get in touch with us."

Little Ray of Giving is a Big Help

The annual gift drive is one of many ways that the business gives back to the community,



Mattias with Hope Church Pastor Lionel (above) and Barbara & Frances of Community Outreach



Mattias says. "For the last eight Christmases, we have proudly run 'A Little Ray of Giving' in close collaboration with Hope Church 2508.

"The process is a beautiful reflection of community spirit. In addition to contributing ourselves, we invite our incredibly generous neighbours here in Helensburgh to donate unwrapped gifts, which are collected under a special Christmas tree in our office."

Donations go to local families, from single parents to those experiencing hardship. In recent years, the outpouring of generosity has been so great that organisers have also been able to assist displaced people in Port Kembla.

Donations Support People in Need

2025's initiative will support two causes.

"The Ray White Helensburgh office will proudly continue its relationship with Hope Church whilst also partnering with Community Outreach," Mattias says.

"We have personally observed the incredibly important work done by Barbara Atkins, the founder of Community Outreach. This amazing organisation focuses on a vital need: helping survivors of domestic violence by furnishing empty homes and connecting women with essential services as they rebuild their lives." ✨

a little
**Ray of
Giving**

Everyone deserves to smile this Christmas

Show your Christmas spirit by helping those less fortunate in
our local community. To take part in a Little Ray of Giving,
kindly drop in a present to our:

Ray White Helensburgh office before the 11th of Dec.

Ray White Thirroul office before the 16th of Dec.



Family roll dice on card game

By Tyneesha Williams

For Bulli dad Joel Bettson, board games provide hours of quality time with his kids. So when his youngsters grew bored with slow games from the shop, the family spent a day scribbling on blank cards at the kitchen table. Together, they created a 10-minute card game – The Golden Sausage.

Friends and family soon got on board, excited by the simple, fast-paced family game with an Aussie spin. Now the game is available at Collins Booksellers and online Australia-wide.

The premise is simple: collect four golden sausages to win; use 15 cheeky action cards to do it. Steal cards, roll dice, play 'paper, scissors, rock' and block an attack with the 'yeah/nah' card.

"We knew that the card had to be something that you collect to win," Joel says, "and I was like, well, what is more silly than a sausage?"

Joel and his partner, Haley, see the Golden Sausage as a fun, screen-free way to spend time with their daughter and son (aged seven and nine).

"There's enough chance that kids can win without having to use too much strategy. But then when the kids go to bed and the adults want to keep playing, there's enough strategy in it to keep



them really engaged," Joel says.

After Joel decided to get a box together, with the help of graphic designer Kaisa and photographer Sasha Faint, a limited run of 200 sets broke even. Now an order of 500 games is being rolled out.

Joel says The Golden Sausage is the perfect stocking-stuffer. It's also making an impact beyond the coffee table – from every game sold, \$2 is donated to the Kids with Cancer Foundation.

"Exploding Kittens has sold 25 million copies. So if we could sell 500,000 copies, we get to donate a million dollars to a fantastic charity," Joel says. ✨



A collection of family favourites
for your calendar

325 Station's Santa Fire Truck Run

Santa Claus is busy stacking his sleigh with lollies for the annual Santa Fire Truck Run through Helensburgh and Stanwell Tops. The much-loved community event will return on Saturday, 20 December when Fire + Rescue 325 Station's big red fire engine will depart around 9am from the station on Walker St to hand out pre-packed lollies to all good children gathered safely along the route.

Christmas Carols, Markets & More

5 & 6 Dec Helensburgh Girl Guides Christmas Tree Sale, from 4pm Friday and 9am Saturday (unless sold out) at the Guide Hall, 4 Chippendale Place, Helensburgh. \$100 for 6ft trees, cash only.

5 Dec Carols in Corrimal, Ziems Park, 5pm.

6 Dec Combined Churches Carols in the Burgh, Saturday, 6-8.30pm

6 Dec Bikers Toy Run, convoy arrives 11am, with celebrations till 12:30pm at Crown Street Mall

11 Dec Carols in MacCabe Park, 6:30-8:30pm

13 Dec 2pm Handel's Messiah, Illawarra Choral Society Concert at Wollongong Town Hall

14 Dec Sunday Village Market, Bulli Showground, 9am-2pm

14 Dec Carols by the Sea, Austi Beach, 7pm

22 Dec Coledale Twilight Market, Coledale Public School 2-8pm

Charity calls

Until 14 Dec City of Wollongong's Giving Tree: donate via your library by December 14.

22 Dec Need A Feed will hold its annual Christmas breakfast at McCabe Park. Support their work to provide those in need with a hot breakfast, food gifts, and connection. Go to needafeed.org

Christmas at Your Library

9 Dec Santa Storytime at Thirroul 10-10:45am

19 Dec Christmas Storytime – Ho ho ho!

Free, 10:30-11:15am Helensburgh Library

10 Dec Santa Storytime at Wollongong Library, 10am-10:45 am

10 Dec Crafternoon at Helensburgh, 3:30-4:30pm

17 Dec Christmas Crafternoon at Thirroul, 3:30-4:30pm. Craft, laugh and be merry! ✨



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Scouts afloat thanks to funding

By 1st Austinmer Scouts committee chair Sam Donohoe

1st Austinmer Scout Troop has been awarded multiple grants, thanks in large part to the quiet and consistent efforts of our former committee chair and current grants chair: volunteer-extraordinaire Paul Rustomji. We wish to share our gratitude for the following:

- NSW Government Community Building Partnership Grant of \$18,684 for external hall repairs, with thanks to Maryanne Stuart, Member for Heathcote, for support.
- Federal Stronger Communities Grant Program, \$10,000 for internal hall repairs, with thanks to Cunningham MP Alison Byrnes for her support.
- Horizon Bank funding of \$4200 for hall repairs.
- Energy Australia Tallawarra Grants, \$3780 for two new eskies and personal flotation devices.

All of the funds mentioned above have already been put to use with professional updates to the 1st Austinmer Scout Hall, including new interior hall paint and lighting, and also replacement of a portion of the exterior hall cladding and two exterior windows. Meanwhile our Venturers



section have already successfully tested the troop's new personal flotation devices during a recent kayak out of Wollongong Harbour. Thank you again to our generous funders!

Hire 1st Austinmer Scout Hall

Perfect for a child's birthday party, the hall at 20 Moore St, Austinmer is available for hire for \$30/hr, \$120/day. Contact Ron on 0409 399 752.

Scouting enquiries to Steve, 0409 695 575 ✨



The most wonderful time

By Isla Cormican, 12, Helensburgh Girl Guides

This November, our Girl Guide unit, along with our Leader Brolga, went on an exciting outing to Strike Bowling in Wollongong.

We had two lanes for bowling and split into groups. Liana won the game of bowling in my team. After that, we played a round of Laser Tag, where we were divided into three teams: Earth, Fire and Ice. The Earth team were the winners! When we finished all the activities and were picked up by our parents, we met up again at Yo-Chi for dessert, which was a sweet way to end the night. One of the funniest moments was during Laser Tag – it was so dark that we kept bumping into each other!

To volunteer at the Girl Guides, visit www.joininguides.com.au or call 1300 447 548. ✨

Deck the halls

By Scarborough principal Emma Hutchinson

Visitors to Scarborough Public School will notice something truly special in our hallways and library: stunning artworks created by talented artists from the Coomaditchie United Aboriginal Corporation. Each piece tells a unique story, offering our students and community a chance to reflect, connect, and learn.

Our school has also begun an exciting collaboration with the Wollongong Conservatorium of Music, bringing high-quality music education to every student. All children have gained access to the school band program and weekly in-class tuition, thanks to the generous support of our Parents & Citizens Association. Music education is more than learning notes. It nurtures critical and creative thinking. When children engage in music, they develop resilience, imagination, and a sense of belonging. ✨



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The return of berry picking

By Kieran Tapsell

Early colonial records dating back to 1832 suggest the Dharawal name for the area between Stanwell Park and Bulli was Jujinbellily or a variant of that spelling. Stanwell Park for many years was known as “Little Bulli”. It was common for the colonial settlers to shorten Aboriginal names, an example being Kurranulla becoming Cronulla. The practice continues with “The Gong”. The name Bulli sounds very much like a shortening of Jujinbellily.

Blackberry picking from Stanwell Park to Bulli became common on weekends when steam trains travelled between Sydney and Wollongong. In an Australian reversal of the European conquest of Latin America, the tasty European invader, Blackberry, was slowly smothered by the toxic Latin America conquistador, Lantana. Green Lantana berries can be toxic for children and animals, but birds seem to be able to eat them without ill effects, except for the environmental damage their excrement leaves behind.

The house in Stanwell Park that I bought in 1972 was surrounded by Lantana that reached to the roof gutters. My original tool for controlling the Lantana was a billy goat, because the comic books of my childhood had regaled me with the fake news that goats could eat anything, even tin cans. I named my ugly and aggressive billy goat ‘Syphilis’, and there were times at parties when friends asked me, in the presence of strangers, “Do you still have Syphilis?” Syphilis finally died, probably because of his restrictive Lantana diet with its toxic seeds.

In 2019, I bought some Brush Cherry seedlings (*Syzygium australe*) from the Wollongong Botanic Garden and planted them in the Stanwell Avenue Reserve where I had been removing the Lantana. After a few years, they gained size and started to



flower and fruit. I made delightful jam, then I germinated the leftover seeds into a new generation of trees. We planted about 190 Brush Cherry seedlings throughout the reserve, and where necessary, protected them from deer with cages.

Visit <https://www.newterrainlandscapedesign.com.au/blog/> for a Lilly Pilly jam recipe.

Flax Lily (*Dianella caerulea*) is another source of bush tucker we have planted extensively in the reserve. Its attractive dark blue flowers produce a berry of the same colour. Before eating or cooking them, read the Blueberry Lily article on Aussie Bush Tucker at www.selfsufficientculture.com.

Blackberry picking in Stanwell Park disappeared with the Lantana invasion, and experience proved that Syphilis did not deter the Latino invader. Now, with the regeneration of the Stanwell Avenue littoral rainforest, we may have achieved a gastronomical reconciliation of our Aboriginal and colonial cultures. We have converted the practice of picking exotic blackberries into a real bush tucker gathering of the indigenous Brush Cherry and Flax Lily in the area our forebears called Jujinbellily. 🌟



Bird Watch
By Ewan Auld

Leaden Flycatcher (*Myiagra rubecula*)

The bird of the month is the Leaden Flycatcher, a passerine species occurring across eastern and northern Australia. This small insectivore is found in a wide range of forested habitats, and can be occasionally seen in the Illawarra, particularly along areas of the escarpment. They have a very distinctive buzzing call, and will often feed around the upper canopy, flicking their tail as they call. The sexes are easy to tell apart. Males display blue-grey reflective plumage over the whole head, while females have a bronzy-orange throat. I photographed this male along the Number 10 Fire Trail in Darkes Forest, where it occasionally ducked down to the lower vegetation chasing falling insects. 🌟

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Drones spy koalas and gliders

By Amanda De George

For years, locals have wondered if koalas could still be found in the Illawarra. Personally, I've spent many an hour looking up into the eucalypt canopy, just in case. Sightings are rare – in 2016 when eight individuals were spotted in Mt Kembla it was the first recorded sighting in that area for over 70 years.

Now a pioneering new study by Symbio Wildlife Park and the University of Wollongong has confirmed that Koalas (*Phascolarctos cinereus*) and Southern Greater Gliders (*Petauroides volans*) are not only present but that our region could be a critical stronghold for the endangered species.

Published in *Australian Mammalogy*, the study is the first large-scale abundance mapping using thermal drone technology of these two arboreal mammals. Led by Symbio's Jarrad Prangell and Kevin Fallon, and supported by UOW researchers, the project surveyed 47 sites over more than 1175 hectares of steep, heavily vegetated terrain.

"Modern thermal drone technology has revolutionised how we find and count cryptic wildlife," lead author Jordyn Clough of UOW's School of Science and Environmental Futures said.

"In areas where spotlighting could take hours to locate a single animal, along with the associated hazards of access and safety, our drones can safely detect, verify and map respective species within just minutes, covering upwards of 25 hectares of land in around 20 minutes."

The results were striking. Across the survey area, the team confirmed 56 koalas and 127 southern greater gliders, with modelling estimating true abundances of 147 koalas and 195 gliders. While the densities – 0.13 koalas and 0.17 gliders per hectare – are considered low, the populations

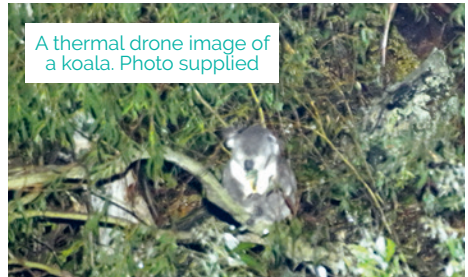
appear stable, resilient, and more widely distributed than expected.

"This project shows what's possible when collaboration, technology and conservation work hand-in-hand," said Kevin Fallon, senior business manager and chief drone pilot at Symbio.

Kevin said the koalas were seen "across the plateau west of Wollongong" and the closest suburb to a sighting was probably Mt Kembla. Their exact location must remain confidential, "to ensure the safety of the koalas, along with maintaining security and alleviating trespassing".

Funded by Symbio Wildlife Park and GM3, the project was completed with conservation partners WaterNSW and the NSW Government's Saving our Species Greater Glider team.

Designed by drone specialist Dr Chad Beranek, the research model allowed researchers to sample the same forest systems over two years, which would be hard to do on foot amid steep slopes and dense under-storey. And yet, I know on my next bushwalk, I'll be face up, peering into the treetops, hoping for koalas. ✨



A thermal drone image of a koala. Photo supplied

Calls to protect wildlife on our roads

By Genevieve Swart

In the past month, residents have seen more snakes wiped out on Buttenshaw Drive, Coledale.

A spokesperson for WIRES said the wildlife rescue charity is concerned about region-wide animal deaths. "We would greatly welcome a government and/or council study to better identify roadways and areas across the Illawarra where significant wildlife fatalities are occurring due to speeding traffic and lack of warning signage," the WIRES spokesperson said.

"This issue is particularly evident on Buttenshaw Drive where more wildlife warning signs, reduced speed limits and even speed humps would help

reduce the increasing impact on our much loved native animals."

After November's article, 'Call for action on river of death', revealed the extent of wildlife fatalities on the backroads from Wombarra to Austinmer, the *Flame* contacted Wollongong Council and Transport for NSW. As other areas have more traffic and higher safety risks, Council said Buttenshaw Drive was not a funding priority for traffic calming, while Transport for NSW said without calming measures to slow cars, this rural road would not be a priority for a 30km/h zone.

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Unwrapping disappointment

By architect Ben Wollen



As my kids have grown older and are entering their double-digits, I've found buying Christmas gifts for them increasingly trickier and/or more expensive. Although it doesn't feel like it, in a way, this is a very privileged place to be (or at least it is for my kids!). We're lucky enough to be able to provide them with all of their needs and with plenty of wants. I think I'm not the only parent out there who cringes at the idea of another object (i.e. consumer good) added to the treasure trove of objects already in their room (and/or our house) that will likely remain untouched for much of its presence in the familial space and then likely thrown out. Jettisoned hopefully to someone who will play with it more frequently or – worst-case scenario (and the more likely one) – discarded into landfill. Of course there are the activity gifts that are a much better option but they just don't look as great under a Christmas tree unless you do the box within a box within a box and still they can feel somewhat unfulfilling because somehow we want the immediate tangibility an object provides.

It may seem a difficult thing to digest but I'm going to suggest that its important for kids to, at one point, be disappointed by Christmas gifts whether that be in the form of an activity gift or just something that they didn't really want.

I recall back when I was a young 'un, my parents had left buying presents for us kids to the last minute. At the ripe old age of 7, I received a shaving pack of toiletries, a towel, and a cheap wristwatch. I've not been clean shaven or punctual since! It wasn't until later that I found out Mum and Dad were busy nursing my Grandfather through his last bouts of cancer therapy and had lost track of time until the only thing open on Christmas Eve was the late-night chemist. One of the Christmases I'll never forget and now I have a little tale to tell of expectations not being met.

I'm not a religious person, at least not in the traditional sense of attending an organised congregation on a regular basis and praying to

God. I do however see the merits of the bonding/community nature of religions. While my kids still have expectations for Christmas gifts, I'm quick to remind them that it's not the festival of receiving but of giving. Every year there are many people doing it tough at Christmas time. There are so many great local charities to support. One of those was our charity festival partner of the Illawarra Festival of Architecture & Design 2025 – The Illawarra Women's Trauma Recovery Centre, designed by IFAD curator Margie Rahmann.

We helped to raise more than \$500 this year at our charity event but they can always do with some more support, so if you want to intentionally disappoint one of your young 'uns this year, buy them a gift that keeps on giving at www.womenstraumarecoverycentre.org/

And, this wouldn't be an architecture article if I didn't add some thoughtful architecture-inspired gift ideas for those inspiring young Frank Lloyd Wrights out there who need to roll their eyes at some inspiring architecture. My top tips list below.

- Sydney Architecture Walks sell vouchers to their excellent walks / bike rides: www.sydneyarchitecture.org/gift-cards/
- As does the Australian Architecture Association: www.architecture.org.au/tours/sydney-walks
- Or if you want to just explore the Opera House : www.sydneyoperahouse.com/tours/architectural-tour
- For the little tykes there is, of course, Lego but get the recycled variety at brickresales.com.au/collections/shop-all
- And a repost from previous years, these are the toys that helped Frank Lloyd Wright develop an early interest in architecture and design: montessori.com.au/product/froebel-gifts-14-activity-set-compact

Wishing all *Flame* readers a wonderful festive season. My top tip for 2026 – get out there and experience more of the wide world of Architecture! 🌟

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Federal Member for Cunningham Alison Byrnes and Energy Futures Network Director Ty Christopher try out the new exhibits at UOW's Science Space. Photos supplied



Engineer turns toymaker

By Genevieve Swart

Look out, Questacon – just in time for the summer holidays, Wollongong's Science Space has welcomed interactive new exhibits to rival those at Australia's national science centre and demystify the energy system at a record-breaking time, when almost half of our grid is running on renewables.

"It's a refit of almost the entire upper floor of the Science Space at the Innovation Campus here at the University of Wollongong," says Energy Futures Network Director Ty Christopher.

"The exhibits are going to be highly interactive. This isn't a museum that you walk through and just look at things. This is tactile ... You've got to turn knobs, you've got to turn dials.

"Questacon will be envious as to how cool, funky and amazing it looks."

A South Australian company called Exhibition Studios has made the 29 new exhibits, briefed by UOW experts, including Science Space Director Stuart Creal and early learning academics. For Ty – who ended a four-decade industry career as Endeavour Energy's 'chief engineer' – switching from designing state-size power systems to child-size exhibits has been a career high.

"Who does not want to design cool toys – the dream of every engineer," he says, laughing.

Clean energy education comes in the form of games, from firing a single bead for mechanical power to running a multi-player city challenge to keep the lights on. And whether generating electricity via waves, wind, solar or good old bicycle pedal power, all the energy exhibits are linked in one "really exciting" way.

"They all connect to this huge central battery," Ty says. "As they're generating energy during the day, this battery will fill up, and then once it reaches a certain level, you'll be able to hit, 'okay, discharge the battery', and the energy will flow out and light up exhibits and power everything."

Funded by \$2.5 million of a \$10m grant UOW received from the federal government for its Energy Futures Skills Centre in 2022, the new exhibits are on the top floor of Science Space, but don't displace the popular dinosaurs or construction play zone. They're for all abilities, so everyone can have a go at creating wave energy, solar power or even Wollongong's most controversial renewable – wind. Electrification fans can try configuring a mini house, its trees and solar panels, to experiment with time and seasons to understand how variable solar on homes can be.

Amid all the fun, there's a satisfying symmetry with the Science Space building itself – it's one exhibit to rule them all. "We've covered the roof of the Science Space with solar panels and installed a huge battery in the side," Ty says. "What that means is the Science Space itself has now become an energy-neutral building in and of itself, which is great for its sustainability, environmentally, and financially, I might add.

"We've turned the operation of the building and its own energy use into a major exhibit." 🌟



Keeping kids safe over summer

By Dr Elliot Wichlinski of Bulli Medical Practice

As summer heats up across the Illawarra, kids are diving into pools, tearing around playgrounds, and gearing up for sports. While the season brings a lot of fun, it also comes with a few risks worth preparing for. Here's how to keep your children healthy and happy this summer:

Beat the Heat

Heat illness can sneak up quickly on hot, humid days—especially during active play. Watch for warning signs like heat rash (small red bumps in sweaty areas), muscle cramps in the legs or abdomen, or dizziness after standing. Heat stroke is serious: confusion, seizures, or loss of consciousness require calling 000 immediately and cooling with wet cloths or ice packs to the neck, armpits, and groin.

Prevention matters: Encourage regular water breaks even if kids aren't thirsty, and avoid sugary or caffeinated drinks. Dress them in breathable clothing and schedule intense activities for early morning or late afternoon when temperatures are cooler.



Tiny Ticks, Big Caution

After bushland adventures, check behind ears, the scalp, armpits, and groin for ticks. If you find one, don't use tweezers—freeze it with an ether spray from the pharmacy instead. Watch for rash, fever, or fatigue afterward, and see your GP if concerned.

Safe in the Surf

Bluebottles love our beaches! Teach kids never to touch jellyfish, even dead ones. If stung, rinse with seawater (not fresh water), remove tentacles carefully, and immerse the area in hot water (40–45°C) for 20 minutes. Skip the ice and vinegar—hot water works best. Call 000 for breathing difficulties or allergic reactions.

A Final Word

Summer should be carefree, and with a little preparation, it can be. Consider a quick GP check-in before the season starts to update asthma plans, vaccinations, or sports clearances. Prevention is powerful, and we're here to help. ✨

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Snakes: our unsung Aussie heroes

By Jennifer Kay, a rescue volunteer with WIRES Illawarra

In summer, we are more likely to encounter snakes. They are more active, searching for food and finding a mate. Australia has about 200 species of snakes but only a handful have life-threatening bites. Like all native wildlife, snakes are protected so it is against the law to kill or injure them.

Being aware of snakes is part of life. Our snakes are not aggressive and only attack if provoked.

Hugh Marriott, reptile co-ordinator for WIRES Illawarra, says: "Treat all snakes with respect and learn to identify them. The best way to avoid being bitten is to leave them alone. Use common sense because most snakes are just moving through the environment trying to avoid trouble."

So why do we call snakes Aussie heroes?

- Snakes are good recyclers! They eat seed-eating animals but cannot digest the seeds, so these are dispersed, helping to generate native bush.
- Snakes are both predator and prey. They are like unpaid employees, eliminating rodents, such as rats and mice, and other urban pests. In turn, snakes are food for birds, including eagles, falcons, owls, kookaburras and butcher birds.
- Snake venom has been used for centuries as a key ingredient in a wide variety of pharmaceuticals.
- Snakes feature strongly in creation stories, paintings and carvings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples, who highly value them.
- Snakes are an indicator of a healthy ecosystem.

It is important to protect our snakes.

Hugh is concerned about the negative impact of rodenticides commonly used in our community.

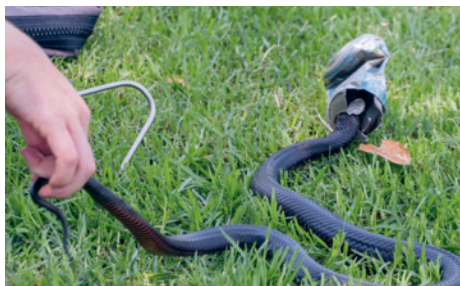
"Native wildlife, such as snakes and owls, who rely on rats as a regular food source, succumb to secondary poisoning after eating rats that have been baited with poison," he says.

"It is essential to seek more sustainable alternatives to traditional pest control methods, to protect the wildlife that plays a crucial role in controlling pest populations".

What to do if you see a snake in your yard?

Firstly, do not panic! Give it space and back away slowly. Allow it to leave. Snakes usually move on if given time. If it's trapped in your property, contact WIRES on 1300 094 737. Keep pets and children away and never try to catch or kill it. If bitten, it is a medical emergency. Immediate First Aid is required and always call 000.

If you find a snake in your house, move to another room, close the door and put a towel at the bottom of the door. Call WIRES immediately. 🌟



Clockwise, from left: A Green Tree Snake trapped in corrugated iron fencing; a Green Tree Snake trapped in a wheel; a WIRES volunteer rescues a Red-Bellied Black Snake with its head trapped in a drink can; Photos: WIRES

ONE REGION, STILL TWO VERY DIFFERENT MARKETS

While the Illawarra property market has stabilised, a divide has emerged between price brackets – and the gap is widening. Homes priced under \$2 million remain highly competitive, driven by first home buyers, upgraders and Sydney commuters searching for lifestyle and value. Well-presented homes in this range are still selling fast, often with multiple offers and short campaigns.

Meanwhile, properties above \$2m are facing a slower path to sale. Buyer depth is thinner, and many listings sit on the market until expectations adjust. Prestige homes that once attracted immediate interest are now requiring price realignments or strategic repositioning before a deal can be done.

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Suburbs like Helensburgh and Stanwell Tops continue to benefit from affordability relative to Sydney, keeping the sub-\$2m market buoyant. In Stanwell Park, Wombarra, Coledale, Austinmer and Thirroul, the top end is seeing longer days on market, more withdrawn listings and an emphasis on price transparency. The lesson?

The days of blanket pricing are over. Success now depends on understanding which market you're in – and tailoring your strategy accordingly. For sellers under \$2m, competition is your advantage. For prestige sellers, realism, presentation and patience are essential.




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NIRAG/NF3 Report

By Ross Dearden, secretary of Northern Illawarra Residents Action Group (NIRAG)

NIRAG supports preservation of open space and the retention and enhancement of our Natural Environment, European and Indigenous Heritage.

Since 2020 in the role of Wollongong Council's Neighbourhood Forum 3, all Woonona, Bulli, Thirroul and Austinmer residents are welcomed to attend NIRAG quarterly meetings.

The NIRAG/NF3 quarterly meeting was held on Wednesday, 12 November:

1. Homes NSW proposal at 6-10 Southview St, Bulli was to replace 3 existing homes with 16 units 3-storeys high, even though this is a R2 zoned area with a 2-storey limit. Maryanne Stuart, Member for Heathcote, has strongly advocated to support residents' concerns. In September she achieved a pause in the process, proposed that she wanted to "start with a fresh piece of paper" and gave the community assurances that the proposal would be modified in scale and reduced to two storeys. This was seen to be a huge success BUT the revised plan has only reduced the height of part of the building! It is still a non-compliant 3-storey block of units in a R2 zone! The community is outraged at this deception, saying "it does not pass the pub test".

Ms Stuart is asked to have the design revised before public exhibition. We also ask Minister Scully to ensure that Homes NSW does not repeat this fiasco; so that all social housing in Wollongong LGA complies with the intent of new State Government policies and does not exceed the DCP/LEP constraints that all developers must follow. This site is clearly outside the 800m distance from essential services as required by the Mid-Rise Housing Policy.

Join the Facebook group "Sensible Development in The Suburbs" for updates and to give support.

2. Amy Street, Thirroul: DA 2025/374: A DA for a dwelling on part of Lot 303 zoned R2 was approved by the Wollongong Local Planning Committee, on 28 October. The majority (about 7ha) of the lot is zoned C2, Environmental Conservation west of the shared cycleway between Woodlands Ck and Hewitts Ck, Thirroul. NIRAG is concerned about the potential loss of public access to McCauley's Beach, and ongoing management of the C2, Environmental Conservation part of the land. This land is a vital Green Corridor (similar to the Keira and Kembla Green Corridors) and public ownership has strong community support.

NIRAG met Council's GM, Greg Doyle, in October and last month met Maryanne Stuart on site. Council has now agreed to undertake a review of the strategic need for public ownership.

With Council and the developer's cooperation, a rezoning of part of the C2 land to C4 (Environmental Living) could be a way to move forward (at no cost to ratepayers) by separating most of the C2 land from the R2 residential area.

3. Roadworks at Station St and Park Rd, Bulli are well advanced and changes have been made to parking and right-turn bans ready for traffic light reconstruction with a 30km/h limit on Station St, Railway and Bank streets and Veigals Lane.

NIRAG's next quarterly meeting will be on 11 February 2026 at Bulli Community Centre, email nirag@bigpond.com ✨



NIRAG members with Cr Richard Martin at the November meeting. Photo: Anthony Horneman



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Fantastic Circular Plastics team

Helen Lewis thanks the volunteers who make up Circular Plastics Illawarra

The past year has been a significant one for Circular Plastics Illawarra (CPI). Our group was formed two years ago after the collapse of the supermarket recycling scheme for soft plastics. Since then, CPI has been working closely with the Illawarra Shoalhaven Joint Organisation (ISJO), local councils and industry partners to test alternative regional collection systems.

In October and November, drop-off events were held in Albion Park, Towradgi and Minnamurra, collecting more than 1800kg of soft plastics for recycling, and Unanderra-based social enterprise Flagstaff Group is now accepting household soft plastics at limited times through the week.

In a separate development, Woolworths has recommenced soft plastics recycling at all of their stores in the Illawarra (and nationally).

This year, we've seen progress at a national level:

- Soft Plastic Stewardship Australia (SPSA) was established to implement an industry-funded recycling scheme for soft plastics
 - iQ Renew officially launched its advanced soft plastics recycling facility in Taree, NSW
 - Other recyclers are now accepting soft plastics, including Close the Loop, APR Plastics, saveBOARD and Replas.

In 2025 we stepped up our community engagement through events and social media. A stall at April's Rotary GreenFest sustainability



L to R: Cherry Hardaker, John Black, Ann Brown, Helen Lewis, Kari Hill, Tillmann Bohme, Katrina Marshall

expo was a great opportunity to talk to many people about how to reduce and recycle plastics.

Another exciting development is a new partnership with Circular Australia, ISJO, the University of Wollongong and other stakeholders to explore options for a circular precinct in the Illawarra. Circular precincts create physical spaces for new organisations to leverage sustainable infrastructure, like renewable energy systems, waste management facilities, recycling, repair, remanufacturing and reuse solutions. A new Circular Illawarra Taskforce has been formed to promote initiatives and collaborate on projects.

More info at www.circularplasticsillawarra.org 🍀

Tradies at the frontline

By Elsa Evers of Electrify 2515

The Electrify 2515 Community Pilot is in full swing, with offers sent to eligible households eager to swap old gas appliances for efficient electric alternatives. Hundreds of community members are already taking the next steps, securing quotes for heat pump hot water systems, reverse AC, and induction cooktops, and scheduling installations. This progress is largely thanks to the skill and dedication of our local trades.

The pilot includes 11 installers with diverse expertise, including hot water specialists, Level 2 electricians, and solar and battery companies with experience designing smart, whole-house systems that maximise solar and storage while minimising bills.

Brighte, the pilot's installation partner, has included a selection of quality trades for participants. Brighte Project Engineer Ekansh Lathwal says: "We are proud to have a strong

contingent of quality installers involved. They can cater to a wide variety of budgets and help find the right solution for all 500 homes and families."

The pilot has been a learning curve for tradies too, with the installation of smart energy systems in every home.

Scott Prioste, owner of Wollongong-based HOTT Electricals, said: "I love the idea that the homeowner can look on their phone, and see what their solar or battery is producing, or how much energy the heat pump and aircon are using. Once they've got that information, they can make smarter choices, and live better."

If you're curious about going all-electric, there's still time to join the Electrify 2515 Community Pilot. Eligible applicants can get subsidies approved and start requesting quotes immediately.

Visit electrify2515.org for installers or to apply. 🌟

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Update from the TVC

By Annette Jones, secretary of Thirroul Village Committee

In early November Council placed plans for the northern suburbs skatepark on public exhibition, with the preferred location being Thirroul's WF Jackson Park. The community was encouraged to make submissions to Council about this proposal.

The TVC has always supported the construction of a skate park and, over almost 30 years, worked with Council and various skater groups to identify a suitable location. Many TVC and community members have concerns about Council's preference for WF Jackson Park due to its proximity to the busy Lawrence Hargrave Drive (LHD), and the well-used adjacent pedestrian footpath. The TVC has raised these concerns with Council, which stated that mitigation measures such as fencing can be constructed to protect pedestrians and skaters.

WF Jackson Park and footpath are on sloping ground and it is feared inexperienced skaters could lose control and collide with a pedestrian or end up on LHD unless safety measures are installed.

Safety concerns have also been raised about park access as skaters travelling by train would need to cross the busy LHD to reach the site. A pedestrian crossing would not be possible in this location.

WF Jackson Park is the only green space the community has in the middle of Thirroul township and, as such, is a prized location. Any skate park would need to be carefully integrated into the available green space to make it inviting for the whole community. Green spaces are invaluable to local communities as well as the environment.

Council's Sport and Recreation team hope that the survey results will be out before Christmas.

Engaging on Thirroul Plaza

The TVC and Save Thirroul Village (STV) continue to engage with project development manager Louis Goulimis, from Solid Void. Louis informed the TVC and STV that work is continuing on the plaza design and that the project is in the testing-of-concept phase for options they are exploring. Once completed, the concept will be presented to the community for discussion. It is anticipated this will happen early in the new year. Thereafter plans will be presented to the Housing Delivery Authority (HDA) for their comment and feedback. The TVC and STV will continue to keep the community informed as to what is happening with the plaza. ✨

Hands fly up to shape Helensburgh centre

November's NF1 meeting drew a crowd, writes Genevieve Swart

Outrage vented at November 12's Neighbourhood Forum 1 meeting has been channelled into a sub-committee determined to engage both residents and council to produce the best possible Community Centre and Library for Helensburgh.

Led by Helensburgh landscape architect Scott Spiers, the new sub-committee aims to represent residents over the next three years in the design and construction process, and rebuild what is widely seen as a broken relationship with Council.

"I've had an amazing response to the group, it's been 25 people within 10 hours and counting," Scott told the *Flame*. "The goal is to improve the Burgh, working with councillors to make it better, while also working to support NF1."

The new volunteers will take a load off long-time NF1 convenor Warwick Erwin, who has been requesting information on the design of Helensburgh's new centre since the location next to the current library was announced last year. Now he's begun a process to access a detailed scope of works under the Government Information Public Access (GIPA) Act. "I can't bash my head against the brick wall any more," Warwick said.

NF1 members feel left out of decision making, saying they're in the dark on design details. These concerns came to a head when Council accepted a \$1.38 million tender at its September meeting, engaging Sherson Architecture to design the new centre and library at 53-55 Walker Street.

November's NF1 meeting attracted 40 people, and heard an outpouring of grievances. The agenda featured three topics: a pool update, the Northern Suburbs Community Complex and a question: "Is NF1 worth continuing – Council doesn't listen and doesn't ENGAGE the community?"

Pool works were on track for a January reopening but council did not attempt to postpone the upgrade until autumn 2026, the meeting heard.

Discussion on the new community centre ran for over two hours, with attending councillors, Dan Hayes and Jess Whittaker, called on for advice.

Residents will see a concept design in early 2026, a Council spokesperson told the *Flame*, with construction planned for completion by the end of 2028. "No decision has been made as to the future use of the Council-owned portion of the land the old centre and community rooms are located on." ✨



Alison Byrnes MP

Labor Member for Cunningham

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Lions serve sangers with slice of fun

By Genevieve Swart

The Lions motto is 'We Serve' and Helensburgh's club certainly lived up to it at their annual Country Fair in October. Not only did volunteers organise a fun-filled day for over 2000 people – who enjoyed carnival rides, market stalls and live music – the Lions' own barbecue was a sell-out success.

All up, the team delivered 1000 servings of sausage sandwiches and bacon and egg rolls.

"It's a lot of work. We plan all year for this event," said local Lion Neil Mahler, who was busy flipping bacon rashers with fellow volunteer Tom Ravelingien while queues stretched across the lawns at Charles Harper Park.

The annual fair requires a council DA and can cost about \$12,000 once fees such as insurance and entertainment costs are factored in. It takes months of planning, then lots of hands on deck over the weekend. While fair-goers began rolling in from 10am on October 25, Lions volunteers started work on Friday night, blocking off the Post Office car park so local fire trucks could be parked there.

"It's been good for the community. That's who we do it for," Neil said.

Crowds gathered for performances by the likes of ADA Dance Group, while queues formed for face-painting at Raeleen's Fancy Faces, including young Gemma (pictured), who we caught mid-transformation into Elsa, the *Frozen* princess.

Over in the community stalls, the new manager at Northern Illawarra Neighbour Aid, Danielle Warner, was hoping to sign up new volunteers for the not-for-profit organisation, which covers the area from Helensburgh to Woonona, providing transport, meals and social events.

"We desperately need more volunteers, particularly drivers, but also hosts and helpers for our community-engagement sessions," she said.

With about 20 puppies in tow, Country Companion Animal Rescue founder Julie-ann Ehrlich had one of the most popular stands at the fair. "Coming into spring, there's always lots of puppies and kittens, because it's the breeding season," said Julie-ann, who rescues many animals from farming communities in country NSW.

With Christmas approaching, Julie-ann's plea to the community remains: "Don't shop – adopt." 🐾

Ho Ho Ho!

Happy holidays from Helensburgh Lions' Fran Peppernell

As our club looks forward to the festive season, we reflect on our past 12 months of events that have brought much enjoyment and fun for the community. We started the year with our Anzac Day service at Stanwell Tops, a respectful tribute to all the men and women who made huge sacrifices for their country, Australia.

We also provided heartfelt support and donations to a local community member who has MND (motor neurone disease). We have sponsored an Australian Lions Hearing Assistance Dog named Toby. We had our very popular Brick Fair which was thoroughly enjoyed by all ages! We did our Mother's Day and

Father's Day gift bags for our residents at Kennett Home. In 2025, we have also donated funds to Wollongong Hospital, Salvation Army, local community members for medical expenses and equipment and key Lions Foundations for natural disasters relief and childhood cancer. And, finally, our wonderful Helensburgh Country Fair, a celebration for the whole community. To all our sponsors, the businesses who kindly donated to our raffle and Wollongong City Council a big thank you!

From all of the Helensburgh Lions we wish everyone in the community a wonderful and safe Merry Christmas for 2025. 🎄



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At left: Janine Westman and Dee Blackmore. Photos: Tyneesha Williams

March to make things right

By Genevieve Swart

Reading aloud the names of the dead at a candlelight vigil was a powerful, pivotal point at October 30's Reclaim the Night gathering, the first in almost a decade where organisers were invigorated by signs of judicial change.

"In 2025, 57 women and 22 children have been lost to gender-based violence," Reclaim the Night committee member Dee Blackmore told a crowd of almost 200 at Flagstaff Hill.

"It is sickening to acknowledge that this number will continue to rise, and it actually rose this morning from 56 to 57 and unfortunately, I stand here to read out these names, and I had to check just before I came up again, in case it had changed. That's how fast, in the 44 weeks of this year, we have lost women."

As dusk fell, the sky mirrored the mood of the marchers, who started with a lively gathering in Andrew Lysaght Park, with drumming, speeches and chants of 'End the silence, stop the violence'.

About an hour and a half later, the event ended in darkness, as people quietly came forward to place flowers and electric candles on a purple blanket on the lawn below the lighthouse. There were bigger candles for the women, little ones for the children, ranging in age from "unnamed child, five days" to "unnamed boy, 17".

In her Welcome to Country, Auntie Bev Armer called it a crisis: "We want to acknowledge and pay our respect to all our sister girls and their families whose lives have been cut short by violence. We light up the lighthouse purple again this year to raise awareness of gender-based violence and sexual harassment, which continues to increase an alarming rate to the point that we are in a crisis."

10 years of Illawarra marches

Reclaim the Night began as a women's protest in Leeds, England in 1977. Wollongong's event was founded a decade ago by Lynelle Samways, of Women Illawarra, and Janine Westman, of

Relationships Australia. Janine said they had grown tired of attending White Ribbon events run by men, so started a march in Crown St Mall that later moved to Flagstaff Hill.

It has always been about more than marching, Janine said. "It's a movement of hearts. It's about visibility. We do make some noise – we've got some chants that can get a bit rowdy. It's about solidarity. It's about the unshakable belief that every person has the right to safety, respect and justice."

In 2016, the Reclaim the Night team took a petition addressing the epidemic of gendered violence to NSW Parliament but until recently they felt that all the years of marching, chanting and lobbying hadn't amounted to much change.

Now, in the Wollongong march's 10th consecutive year, Janine is feeling hopeful.

"The theme this year is Voices for Change, and it's right on time," she told the *Illawarra Flame*.

"There's been an introduction of a non-parole period of 25 years for the perpetrators of domestic and family violence for intimate or former partners. That just came through a couple of weeks ago – so that legislative change is massive.

"It's reinvigorated myself and other people who have worked in the sector for a long time; we were starting to feel pretty disillusioned in the number of women and children being murdered.

"It's a wonderful piece of legislation that's really going to help"

Janine paid tribute to the night's special guest, Tabitha Acret, whose daughter, Mackenzie Anderson, was murdered in 2022 at age 21.

"Tabitha has campaigned relentlessly for justice after the tragic loss of her daughter, Mackenzie, and she's refused to let her pain go unheard," Janine said. "Her voice, her persistence, has helped move this issue from the margins to legislation ... Let's celebrate this milestone and remember our voices have power. Our persistence has purpose, and together, we are voices for change."

Danger not from strangers, mother warns

Tabitha travelled from Newcastle to lead the march, walking alongside local politicians Lord Mayor Tania Brown and Wollongong MP Paul Scully. She told the crowd danger comes not from strangers in the dark but “the ones who should have loved us”.

“I speak because my daughter cannot. I speak because every time another woman is taken, another child grows up without a mother, another family gets the phone call, that changes everything. And I speak because I know I’m not alone.

“Tonight is remembrance, but also about resistance. We remember those we’ve lost, and we resist the idea that this is inevitable. We resist silence and we resist fear, and together, we build something better. Because when a community comes together, when we speak, when we march, when we refuse to be silenced, change does happen, and that’s what my daughter deserves, and that’s what we all deserve.”

'Make things right, reclaim the night'

At Flagstaff Hill as the sun set, Circus Wow performed, Pro Sound and Lighting turned the lighthouse purple, and women shared stories, poetry and songs. Counsellors from Relationships Australia were on hand for anyone who needed to talk and afterwards all the placards – bearing slogans such as “A dress is not a yes” – were returned to a plastic box. MC Lynelle Samways said, “We recycle them every year.”

The Reclaim the Night march will return in October 2026. To seek help and support: NSW Domestic Violence Line 1800 656 463. ✨



True Story triumph

By SCWC's Elizabeth Heffernan



Professor Clare Wright delivered a fantastic keynote speech at November's True Story Festival (photo by Ironbark). Now the South Coast Writers Centre has more events ahead. We're calling for stallholders to join SCWC's Vintage & Art Bazaar on 24 and 25 January 2026 in Coledale Community Hall! Artists, crafters, and vintage and retro sellers are all invited to apply. Local authors can submit their books for inclusion in the Indy Book Stall. Applications are also open for two writer-in-residence opportunities in 2026: a week-long retreat at Jamberoo Abbey in March and our Coledale Writer-in-Residence program. And, finally, our 2026 Poetry Award is open for submissions!

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Cover
feature

Christmas BEETLING ABOUT

With Dr Chris Reid
and an introduction by the editor



Dr Chris Reid. Photos: Anthony Warry

For the past decade, Helensburgh's Dr Chris Reid has been *Beetling About*. As a regular columnist, he's entertained readers with tales of his adventures in entomology, from capturing careless young coconut weevils to driving around the forests of north-east NSW with 4kg of frozen fresh roo poo in a fridge.

Along the way, as vicarious travellers, we've discovered what makes the Illawarra a biodiversity hotspot, the difference between beetles and bugs, how moths pretend to be leaves, and why working with biosecurity agencies is fun. Over the years, Chris has written about 100 articles for his local paper.

Driven by what the *Flame* strongly suspects is a dedication to conservation as fierce as those bombardier beetles he featured in September's edition, Dr Chris writes with a wonderfully wry and gentle humour. He is one of our most popular columnists and has generated more questions than any other (editor's tip: start with this excellent collection of common enquiries at australian.museum/learn/species-identification/ask-an-expert).

Locally, Chris is known for rescuing moths at Helensburgh Station, finding rare beetles feeding on wonga vines and introducing colleagues to Otford's funnel-webs. He's suggested practical ways to engage students with biology, drawn attention to our luck in having living fossils (giant dragonflies) in upland swamps, and opened a can of glow-worms by revealing that the occupants of Helensburgh's most famous train tunnel aren't worms at all – they are, of course, fly maggots.

Nationally, Chris is renowned as the principal research scientist and curator of entomology at the Australian Museum, an advisor to government, CSIRO, universities and biosecurity teams, and the nation's sole expert on leaf beetles. He's also compiled a guide to Christmas Beetles that's now a free app, which we recommend everyone download (it's best used with a magnifying glass, so that's one kid's Chrissy gift sorted too).

In September, when Chris was awarded the 2025 Australian Museum Research Institute (AMRI) Medal, his employer hailed his decades of "scientific excellence", issuing a statement saying: "His research has transformed global understanding of beetle taxonomy, encompassing more than 3,200 species across Australia, the West Pacific, Indonesia and Europe. He has authored numerous papers and open-access resources, contributed to multidisciplinary research projects, and served on the NSW Threatened Species Scientific Committee. Dr Reid's work has also captured public imagination through citizen science initiatives, including the popular Christmas beetle app."



So, for this special Christmas edition of *Beetling About*, we asked Dr Chris to tell us more about his own remarkable career as an entomologist.

"Always find that difficult," he said, in typically understated fashion, "but here goes..."

How it started

In the beginning there was a Mother, who wanted to be a biologist but wasn't allowed by her conservative parents and a Father who left school at 15 without any useful qualifications but discovered nature as a water bailiff in the Scottish highlands. So from early days we were out in the countryside and rearing caterpillars in jam jars, and I must have caught the bug, as it were.

I started off with moths, because the only entomological books we had were *South's British Moths* (my great-grandfather's 1908 edition, which I scribbled on with a biro, sadly). But moths are tricky to set and my mother was always a little sad killing them when the hairy ones had such sweet faces. I discovered that we had a lot of different hoverflies in the garden and it was a challenge to catch them (I didn't have a net) and there was a guide for their identification, so I got into those.

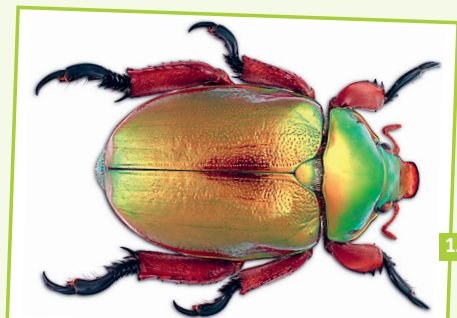
Then disaster – when I went to secondary school I discovered there was a boy three years older than me already collecting hoverflies. I couldn't possibly be seen copying him, so I switched to beetles.

But the fly connection was still important – it just so happened that an entomologist whose speciality was flies had been appointed at the local museum in Belfast – my older friend was drawn in and he brought me along. So began many years of volunteering at the museum.

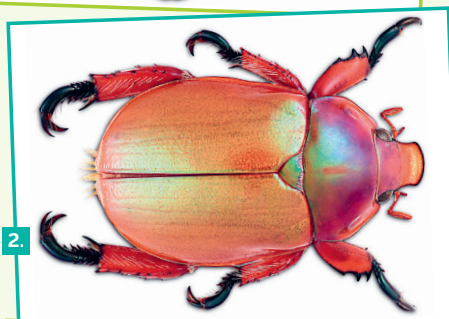
I started publishing short articles on beetle discoveries in Ireland and, to do that, needed to contact experts, expanding my range of contacts and collaborators.

After a few false starts post-school (e.g.

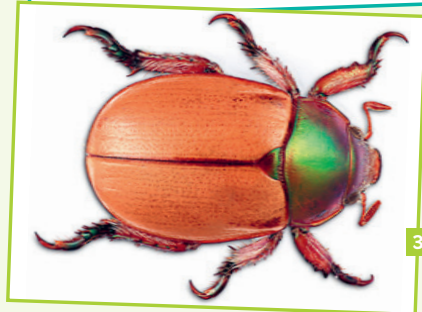
MERRY CHRISTMAS BEETLE HUNTING



1.



2.



3.

Download the Australian Museum's free app, the Christmas Beetle Identification Guide, on Android or Apple.

Dr Chris's tip: "The best way to look for them is to visit strong lights at night, at the edge of forest." Waiting on a train platform at night? You may even see some in the station lights. Share your finds via the 'Christmas Beetle count' run by Invertebrates Australia through iNaturalist and look out for these locals:

1. *Anoplognathus viridiaeneus* (King Beetle);
2. *Anoplognathus montanus* (Duck Billed Beetle);
3. *Anoplognathus flavipennis* (Furry Tailed Prince).

Photos: Mike Burleigh, Australian Museum



becoming an ornithologist), I realised I needed a degree to progress. I discovered that the 'easiest' entomology degree in the UK was agricultural, so I did Agricultural Zoology at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, where, 'coincidentally', two of the staff were beetle collectors.

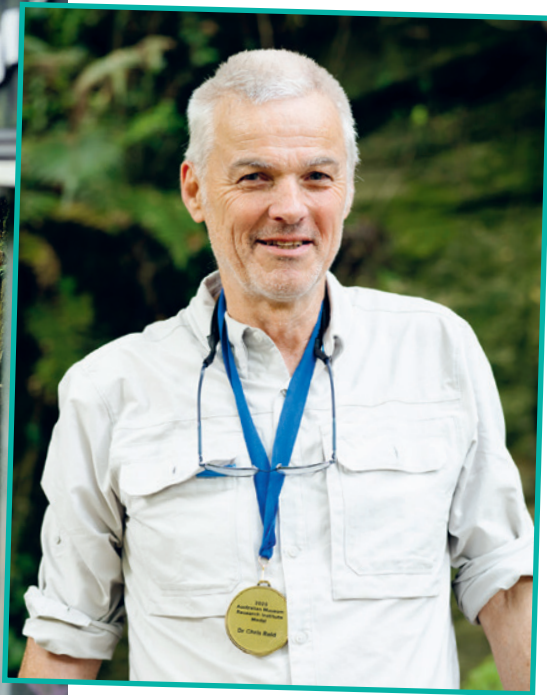
When I finished Honours I was determined not to do a PhD and instead was recruited by an overseas aid organisation as a pest advisor in the Neotropics. However, the host country rejected my application because I didn't have a PhD! I changed my mind.

Where to do a PhD? Definitely not London or the US. My Honours degree supervisor had spent two years working with CSIRO at Canberra in the 70s, studying pests of eucalypt plantations – he said, 'Go to Australia, it's a biologist's paradise, you'll love it.' So I did, and I did.

Adventures around the world

I wish I'd read *The Voyage of the Beagle* early on, because Darwin was a real adventurer, my trips have been feeble by comparison. However, adventures were inculcated early as my father's ambition on holidays was to find a beach with nobody else on it. So we spent hours carrying rucksacks, windbreaks etc just to get to some remote cove on the west coast of Scotland or Ireland.

As part of my work, I've been to Indonesia,



Malaysia, Timor Leste, Papua New Guinea, Solomons, Fiji, many museums in Europe, and throughout Australia. It's a modest list compared to my colleagues.

Perhaps the biggest adventure was three weeks climbing in the Muller Range, Borneo, with a broken foot, an Indonesian ornithologist and three local Hovongan guides. The ornithologist nearly died, I met a bear, and a few other things...

Entomology as a career

Almost everything you need to know is at the Australian Entomological Society website, www.austentsoc.org.au/education/careers. And anybody looking for a career in entomology should join this society [disclaimer: I'm no longer a member].

Pest expertise is always going to be important, increasingly so with climate change and the extraordinary ease with which we now move things around the globe. But insects are increasingly used for control of pests and weeds and this too will only increase.

Something that the AES website does not mention is volunteering. I volunteered for years and many of the students I've taught who have stayed in the subject have also been volunteers. If I have a competent volunteer I usually try to employ them as first pick for any casual positions

that come up (e.g. through grants). So they build up work experience.

The popularity of Christmas beetles

It is only 6 November as I write this, yet already I have had a social media request (from Brisbane) for a story on Christmas beetles. It's amazing how popular they are. I wrote a web-based guide for their identification almost 25 years ago, which was superseded by our app in 2017 (designed and illustrated brilliantly by Mike Burleigh). An updated version of the app is the basis for an annual 'Christmas Beetle count' run by Invertebrates Australia through iNaturalist. Please give it a go this Christmas!

Here are some of the local species.

Anoplognathus viridiaeneus is the 'King Beetle' – it used to be a common species here but is rarely seen now in Sydney, most recent sightings are around Engadine.

Anoplognathus montanus is a common Sydney species and the male has a classic duck-billed head.

Anoplognathus flavipennis is at its southern limit in the Sydney area. There is just one record for the Illawarra and it's very recent (2024). This is a species that we might expect to see more of if climate change predictions are correct. It's an unusual Christmas beetle as it feeds on pinnate acacias, not eucalypts. 🌱



Time to *Speak up*

Janice Greenaune meets Matthew Derbridge, a self-published author and Student Learning Support Officer in local schools, who finds time to develop his organisational and public speaking skills through the not-for-profit organisation Toastmasters

Public speaking does not come naturally to many people and the prospect of having to do it actually scares most of us, but Matthew Derbridge has learned that – through practice and supporting and encouraging people – this fear can be overcome.

“The Helensburgh Toastmasters has offered me a supportive friendship group that is multi-generational, a safe environment, where we can gather and speak with growing confidence, structure and friendship,” Matthew says. “But I also learn leadership and organisational skills. It is a great organisation that is worldwide.”

Matthew began attending meetings at UOW about 11 years ago, then joined Helensburgh and District Toastmasters Club, part of the Wollongong Shire Toastmasters network of six clubs. Last year Matthew worked as Area Director for the clubs.

“I helped to organise contests both within clubs and inter-club events. We have about 60 to 80 members in the Wollongong-Shire area and we are always looking for new members of all ages.

“People may want to gain more confidence in writing speeches and actually speaking in front of a ‘safe’ group. Our members are all very supportive of each other.”

Matthew says he started at Toastmasters “because I struggled to speak in front of a crowd and I recognised this.

“I would get ‘jelly legs’ and very nervous. I would try to develop an alter-ego character to entertain the audience rather than offer real honesty to my audience. But I have kept returning, practising, writing and developing my skills.”

Matthew says speechmaking is not the only thing that keeps him returning to Toastmasters.

“It is also the social aspect: meeting others, like-minded, who are supportive and generous with their criticisms as well as being intergenerational. We are there from all ages, with many differing life experiences.

“One member in Helensburgh, Vicki, has been enjoying Toastmasters for 27 years. We enjoy each other’s company and the speeches that each offer when we meet. We all grow from the experience, but we all become like family.

“As an individual I have grown and am now able to speak truth in my speeches. We all recognise that family, health and work come first in our lives, but confidence through Toastmasters aids many of us in our daily lives and work.”

The Helensburgh Toastmasters Club meets at the Youth Centre in Helensburgh at 7pm on the 2nd and 4th Monday of each month. For more info, email toastmasters2508@gmail.com. ✨

‘A memorial to my Dad’

Debut screenwriter Kari Hill explores grief and healing in the Illawarra

Writer Kari Hill has always been drawn to storytelling that holds space for emotion. This is evident in her screenwriting debut – *Spirals*, a short film about grief, healing, and connection to Country, set against the stunning backdrop of the Illawarra escarpment.

“I’m passionate about heart-led narratives, and this project is a very personal one, drawn from my own lived experience of my Dad dying when I was just 13,” Kari says. “I wanted to explore how nature, memory, and cultural identity can guide us through even the most challenging times. This story is a memorial to my Dad and my way of honouring that journey and offering something to others who may be walking a similar path.”

Backed by Screen Illawarra, Women Illawarra and South Coast Writers Centre, the *Spirals* team includes Sharon Lewis (director/producer), Jess Milne (cinematographer), Antonio Barea (associate producer), Dr Aunty Barbara Nicholson (Aboriginal consultant), Vicki Sugars (first AD), and Anousha Zarkesh (casting director).

The project has had funding from Wollongong Council and Culture Bank Wollongong, and now Creative Australia’s MATCH Lab will match up to \$10,000 in crowdfunding. To contribute, go to australianculturalfund.org.au (search for “Spirals”). Follow @spiralsfilm on Facebook and Instagram ✨



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Whale death by 'outdated technology' to cost city of innovation a tonne

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The young humpback whale that died wrapped in NSW State Government shark nets off the coast of Coledale is set to haunt policy makers long after the public squabble over who should foot the \$44,000 bill for the removal of its carcass.

Last month - after a necropsy showed the whale was a 4.66-tonne juvenile male aged about 12 to 14 months - a Taronga spokesperson told the *Flame*: "Preliminary findings indicate the most likely cause of death was drowning from entanglement in shark netting."

UOW Associate Professor Dr Leah Gibbs said: "This has been such a tragic case - a humpback whale calf killed by the NSW government's shark nets. It is time to take them out of the water. They are an old and outdated technology, that comes from outdated thinking." 🌟



A Men's Shed? WIIFM?

Why go to a Men's Shed? Or join the Lions? Or hold a hose as a Firey? Help out at the P&C? Maybe spend time weeding with

Hello Fish: Patterns emerge

Patterns may come in to focus with three years of shark data, writes Duncan Leadbitter

The shark listening station off Stanwell Park is into its fourth year of operation and there are now three years of data. Previous annual analyses have been published in *Illawarra Flame* in 2023 and 2024.

So, let's dive into the year 2024/25 (June to May). During this period we had 38 visits by great white sharks (33 individuals), 28 by bull sharks (16 individuals) and four by tiger sharks. I tend to drop the tiger sharks from any analysis as the numbers are very low. The numbers are highly variable from year to year as illustrated by Figure 1,

which is for great whites only.

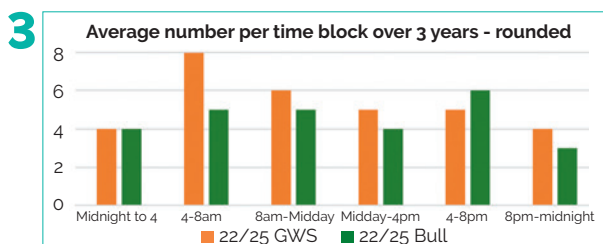
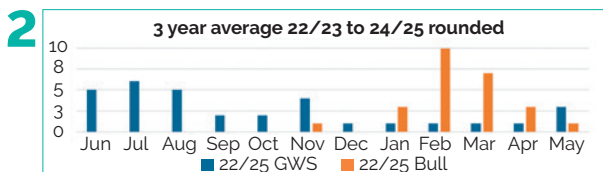
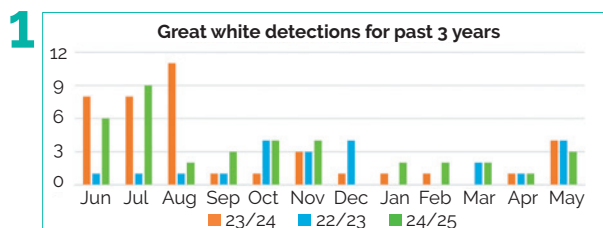
Figure 2 shows the three-year average number of white and bull sharks each month. I have rounded up or down the averages (so 3.3 is 3 and 3.6 is 4). Bull sharks are a late summer and autumn fish, visiting when the water is warm, as has been seen in previous years and is well known from scientific research. White sharks may be around all year but are more prevalent in late autumn and early winter. This may be driven by the whale migration period but white sharks are slightly less abundant when the young whales are on the move south (Oct/Nov).

There has been a lot of local discussion about whether shark numbers are increasing or not. One listening station on the coast doesn't enable this to be answered. The 'window' we have on numbers is based on the number tagged and the number of sharks being tagged is increasing, especially white sharks. Most (70%) of the ones detected have only been tagged in the past two years. This compares to about a third for the bull sharks.

The most common time of day for detections of white sharks is 4-8am and 4-8pm for bull sharks but the differences are minor over the day and likely not statistically significant.

Figure 3 shows averages (rounded up or down) over the three-year period and there is a lot of variability around each number. In general, sharks can be detected at any time.

Next month I will announce the frequent visitor award and delve a bit more into the data. ✨



Landcare, or watch the swimmers at Stanny? Because that's what we do, us Aussies. Help out. Do something meaningful with our time. Be selfless, thoughtful, kind – human.

And speaking of Men's Sheds, perhaps you need a particular tool. Or maybe you can't figure out how the spridget goes back into the whatchamacallit. Or you've always wanted to make something, but don't know where to start. These, and other of life's quandaries, can be answered at the Shed.

I'm fine, you say, got a great garage/shed/

workroom I enjoy, you say. Yep, I can see that. But telling a dad joke to yourself doesn't work, does it? We need people in our lives. Iron sharpens iron, as they say. (And we can teach you how, at the Shed.)

So, WIIFM? (What's in it for me?). We'd love to show you. Come to Helensburgh Men's Shed and find out what Wayne was doing (hint: it's not part of a Tardis). Monday-Wednesday gam to 3pm, 624 Darkes Forest Rd. 0478 892 485 or info@helensburghmensshed.org.au ✨

Strong start to summer

By Christine McDonald of Helensburgh-Stanwell Park SLSC

Helensburgh-Stanwell Park Surf Life Saving Club (SLSC) has launched into an energetic summer, with patrols, Nippers and competition underway.

Club Captain Karl Weber reminds the community that volunteer lifesavers will be on patrol throughout the Christmas break, particularly on public holidays and Sundays. He encourages everyone to swim between the red and yellow flags and stay clear of rips. Karl would like to thank every volunteer who is giving up their time to protect the community over summer.

This season's Nippers program continues to grow, with a large Under-14 group currently training hard for their Surf Rescue Certificate (SRC). The SRC is the first step into lifesaving, giving young members the skills to identify hazards, perform basic rescues and support patrol teams under supervision. Thanks to the dedication of the trainers, the group is progressing well.

We've welcomed many new families into Nippers this season, with children joining from both the local area and beyond, bringing great energy to Sunday mornings.

Our competitors have had a strong start to the



season, with excellent performances at the Wanda One Club Carnival, Beach Stormers and the Sydney Water Series. These early results highlight the momentum building across all age groups.

The return of Senior Pointscore has been a standout, with more than 30 members aged 14 and over taking part in the opening round.

The 40+ Masters turned out in impressive numbers, tackling the swim, board, wade, flags, sprint and marathon with enthusiasm and a few entertaining wipe-outs. It's been a great boost to club spirit. It's not too late to join in the fun, and all information is available on our website. 🌟

Standout performances in club cricket

By Graeme Burrill of Cricket Illawarra

The Helensburgh Cricket Club has made an energetic start to the 2025/26 season across both the senior and junior ranks, with standout performances already shaping a positive early narrative.



In the seniors, the club's return to First Grade was marked by a strong Round 1 one-day win over University, highlighted by Rhys Fowler's 64 runs and four wickets, and Harrison Fairfax's superb five-wicket haul. Second Grade impressed with Mark Cottom's unbeaten 136 against Keira, while Third and Fourth Grade delivered memorable moments, including Kaiden Wildey's five-wicket haul vs Port Kembla, consistent batting from Andrew Ainsworth, and several promising junior debuts. Fourth Grade also celebrated a milestone in Round 2 vs Wests Illawarra Red, as club president Dave Stewart played his 100th match for Helensburgh, scoring 82.

The junior teams have started strongly, with the Under 15s, 13s, 11s all recording early wins. Highlights include Liam B, Samuel C, Archer L-N, and Digby H each scoring over 50, alongside a number of young players earning their first senior-grade opportunities.

Across the club, the opening rounds have showcased depth, enthusiasm, and the exciting development of Helensburgh's next generation – a promising sign for the season ahead. 🌟

Pointscore cut short due to sharks

By Ian Pepper of the Scarborough Boardriders

An eventful month for Scarborough Boardriders kicked off on 1 November at Wanda Beach with the regional qualifier for the Australian Boardriders Battle Final. Our squad nailed the first heat of the day with 1st place, meaning we qualified for the semi-final and, in doing so, qualified for the national final in Queensland next year. Well done team! Unfortunately we finished third by 0.1 point in the semi-final and did not get into the final.

Our last pointscore of the year was on Sunday, 2 November. The forecast was looking great until a whale carcass washed up onto Scarborough Beach on the Monday prior. The whale was towed away but not before leaving fluids in the water that attracted very large fishes. We contacted authorities including Surfing NSW and had permission to run our event as far north as possible, with precautions, including a full-time jet ski patrol (provided by Surfing NSW) and constant drone surveillance.

All started well at Stanwell Park's north end with our over 35s testing out the surf in nice clean 2–3-foot waves. We managed to complete 10 heats across four divisions, then the jet ski sighted sharks. We evacuated our surfers and all other free surfers, and co-ordinated with Stanwell Park surf club, who closed the flags area at the south end. We continued to survey the area with jet ski and drones but more sharks were spotted so we had to terminate the event. This ended our 2025 year.

Senior award in memory of a legend

On 15 November we held our annual presentation at Wombarra Bowlo along with a Mega Raffle and live DJ music from Phoenix Jarvis.

It was a special night as we recognised legendary Johnny Chamberlain by renaming our Senior Club Person award in his memory. This year's recipient

knew Johnny well. David Crossley and son Will joined the club in 2020 and Johnny – who was great at welcoming new members while working away on the BBQ – was the first member they met. David now contributes to the club in many ways including on BBQ duty, washing rashies and as Team Captain this year at the Kirra Junior Teams Challenge. A well-deserved winner of the Johnny Chamberlain Senior Club Person of the Year!

Huge congrats to our 2025 Pointscore winners taking trophies and cash for the top grades:

- Open A Grade – Josh Pepper
- Open Women – Zahlia Short
- B Grade – Mitch Burroughs
- 55s – Brett Davis
- 45s Andrew Christensen
- 35s – Equal 1st Steve Rainford, Jeremy Keed
- 18s – Ashton Mekisic
- Junior Girls – Ella Campbell
- 14s – Oliver Keed
- 12s – Noah Kornek
- Mixed 10's and Under – Kalani Whitton
- Jr Girls Parent Assist – Indi Martin
- Junior Club Person of Year – Will Crossley. 🌟



Elaine Chamberlain with daughter Anna at the presentation.

Net benefits

By Tyneesha Williams



Thirroul Tennis Club is serving up savings and better playing conditions after a \$20,000 grant to install new, energy-efficient LED lighting. This project was one of 16 infrastructure initiatives across the Heathcote electorate that secured funding through the NSW government's 2025 Community Building Partnership Program. Head coach Luke Jurancic says the new lights will directly benefit 119 club members and up to 150 players who he coaches. "Not only is it better for the environment – it's also better and cheaper for members and people wanting to hire the courts, because we are able to drop the price so low," Luke said. With lower operating costs, the club will be able to cut light fees to just \$1 an hour. 🌟

Port Kembla Tidal Chart

December 2025

TIME	M	TIME	M	TIME	M	TIME	M
1 0537 1.50 1146 0.53 MO 1744 1.41 2357 0.34		10 0130 1.22 0651 0.61 WE 1315 1.68 2015 0.34		19 0149 0.56 0830 1.70 FR 1522 0.38 2109 1.18		28 0308 1.35 0855 0.66 SU 1456 1.40 ● 2131 0.41	
2 0626 1.65 1251 0.41 TU 1845 1.40		11 0228 1.23 0752 0.67 TH 1409 1.53 2104 0.41		20 0227 0.56 0908 1.73 SA 1600 0.35 ● 2149 1.19		29 0404 1.45 1013 0.62 MO 1605 1.31 2223 0.43	
3 0043 0.34 0715 1.79 WE 1351 0.28 1945 1.38		12 0324 1.26 0900 0.71 FR 1505 1.40 ● 2149 0.47		21 0305 0.56 0945 1.75 SU 1636 0.33 2228 1.19		30 0500 1.56 1131 0.54 TU 1720 1.26 2317 0.44	
4 0130 0.36 0803 1.91 TH 1449 0.18 2045 1.35		13 0418 1.31 1011 0.72 SA 1604 1.29 2232 0.50		22 0345 0.57 1022 1.75 MO 1715 0.33 2308 1.19		31 0558 1.69 1245 0.42 WE 1833 1.24	
5 0219 0.38 0854 1.99 FR 1545 0.11 ○ 2143 1.32		14 0509 1.38 1122 0.69 SU 1704 1.22 2314 0.53		23 0425 0.57 1100 1.74 TU 1753 0.34 2349 1.19			
6 0310 0.42 0945 2.02 SA 1641 0.09 2240 1.29		15 0555 1.45 1226 0.64 MO 1801 1.17 2353 0.54		24 0508 0.59 1139 1.70 WE 1832 0.35			
7 0402 0.46 1038 2.01 SU 1735 0.12 2336 1.26		16 0637 1.53 1318 0.57 TU 1855 1.16		25 0034 1.21 0555 0.61 TH 1220 1.65 1914 0.36			
8 0457 0.50 1130 1.94 MO 1830 0.18		17 0032 0.55 0716 1.60 WE 1403 0.49 1944 1.16		26 0122 1.23 0646 0.64 FR 1305 1.58 1957 0.37			
9 0032 1.23 0553 0.55 TU 1222 1.82 1924 0.26		18 0111 0.56 0754 1.65 TH 1444 0.43 2028 1.17		27 0214 1.28 0745 0.66 SA 1356 1.49 2043 0.39			

Scan the QR to
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Tide Chart
each month



TIMES AND
HEIGHTS OF
HIGH AND LOW
WATERS
LAT 34° 29'
LONG 150° 55'

MOON PHASE SYMBOLS New Moon ● First Quarter ◐ Full Moon ○ Last Quarter ◑

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Helensburgh Sunday Social Golf Club

By Robert 'Indy' Jones

Sunday, November 2 – a day on the fairways and victory to Tony G from Indy, decided on a count-back on 41 points. Nathan completed the podium with 37. Out there among the ever-improving greens and out-of-play bunkers were Tony G., Rob Carter, Rob Aspromonte, Mark Buckley, Chris Pike, Bruce G., and Ben G. picking up on-course prizes. The chips were a tasty take-home for Bruce.

Our last engagement for 2025 is on December 7 – 9am Tee-Off, followed by our end-of-year celebrations.

Contact Tony on 0418 863 100 for all your membership information and remember to register your attendance and cart requirements on the Tuesday ahead of the date of our next event.

Indy signing off: Tees the season to receive gift-wrapped birdies, jingle balls and a ho-ho-ho in one. Best wishes for a safe and happy festive season. See you in 2026. ✨

Tradies Social Golf

By Barry Thompson

Downtown in shock 162-163 defeat! In contrast to the uptown crew of last year, the downtown crew accepted their defeat with grace. Polite clapping and cries of “Well done, you chaps!” replaced the enraged screams of “We were robbed!” and insults directed at the Struggletowners after our 2024 win.

I had trouble convincing my PC of the veracity of my information when I entered Rod Vaughn and Geoff Hammonds as 1st and 2nd placings in the

individual event. I know it's been a long time, but it is true – well done, old-timers.

Our official November tournament was a stroke event and the third round of the club championships. Mick Carroll (29) placed first with a 59 nett, Paul Morahan (19) recorded a 61, and Iain Birrs (20) was third with a 63 card.

Everyone enjoyed the Moss Vale-Highlands tour and Paul Morahan cut a dashing figure in the club's Gold Jacket. Congratulations, Paul. If you take it OS on a ski trip, please ensure it is heavily insured.

Advice to our President: Kryptonite is Superman's nemesis, sand is yours. Please plan to stay out of the kitty-litter or practice to extricate yourself with under five strokes.

Our next round (December 6 at Boomerang, Tee-Off 7am) is our Loud Shirt charity day for NINA. Please arrive early to aid our starters.

Thank you to Tradies, Helensburgh Butchery, Gallardo's Pizzeria, and Helensburgh Driving Range for their support throughout the year. Thank you too to our committee for another great season.

A Merry Christmas and a Happy 2026 to all. ✨

JENNA NEEDS A HOME!



Jenna, 5, has great manners, a huge heart, gets on well with most dogs, and is easy to walk on a lead. Email ccarpetrehomeing@tpg.com.au  Country Companion Animal Rescue



SATURDAY DECEMBER 6TH | 6PM - 8.30PM

HELENSBURGH PARK
BEHIND TRADIES HELENSBURGH
A FREE COMMUNITY EVENT

6PM FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT 7PM CAROLS
8.30PM FIREWORKS

Helensburgh Car Services



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LPG Rego Checks • Blue Slips

Licence no. MVR1 17877

Child Restraints Fitted

Peter Cox (Proprietor)

187 Parkes St Helensburgh 2508

'Tis the Season of Giving!



CHRISTMAS HAMPER GIVEAWAY

(5 HAMPERS VALUED AT APPROX \$300 EACH)

Is there a deserving member of your community that you'd like to recognise during the festive season? Perhaps they have helped you through a difficult time, or they have contributed to making our community a better place. Email me with why you feel they should receive one of these hampers, along with your contact details.

Entries close at 5pm on Friday 12th December and the winners will be informed on Monday 15th December.

Email your nomination to:
mattias.samuelsson@raywhite.com

