

THE ILLAWARRA *flame*

February 2026



Keeping community news alive

Thistles for all ages

Chris Tangye celebrates historic
club's family-friendly tradition



Meet Our Contributors



Amanda De George is a naturalist, writer and photographer. Her passion lies in discovering interesting critters in urban environments and bringing them to the followers of her Facebook and Instagram page Backyard Zoology. Oh, and adventures and naps and wine; she's passionate about those things too!



Kieran Tapsell is the author of *Tales Old and New from Stanwell Park* in which you can get the full story on the adventures of Syphilis and his nanny, Gonorrhoea. Hard copies are available at the Palms Café and the Beach Kiosk in Stanwell Park. An ebook version is available on Amazon.



Rob Brander – aka 'Dr Rip' – is a coastal geomorphologist and professor at the University of New South Wales in Sydney. A resident of Coalcliff, he's been studying beaches for more than 30 years, starting in Canada where water temperatures convinced him to come to Australia. He is an international expert on rip currents and beach safety and runs a community education program called The Science of the Surf.

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Visit Glenbernie Orchard, shop online or contribute to the fundraiser to help the Fahey family as Glenn battles a brain tumour



Support 'true Aussie farmer'

By Genevieve Swart

The community has rallied round to support the Fahey family at Darkes Forest, with more than \$22,000 in donations pouring in after Glenbernie Orchard farmer Glenn Fahey was recently diagnosed with a brain tumour.

While Glenn is in hospital, having treatment to help reduce the advanced Grade 4 Glioblastoma and manage symptoms, his brother Roger has started a GoFundMe page.

"I'm reaching out with love and a heavy heart to ask for support for my brother, Glenn, and his family," Roger says on the donations page.

"If you know Glenn, you'll know the kind of man he is a true Aussie farmer, hard working, strong, capable, practical, knowledgeable, but also very kind, thoughtful, humble, and always putting others first. He's the sort of person who would do anything for his family and community, and he never asks for help.

"Right now, our family is focused on supporting Glenn through treatment and ensuring that when he is well enough to come home, he can spend precious time surrounded by the people who love him most."

Glenn fell ill before Christmas, as the farm was coming into peak peach harvest season and gearing up to welcome hundreds of visitors on 'Pick Your Own' tours during the holidays.

Glenn runs the sixth-generation family with his wife, Jo-Anne, daughter Casey, son-in-law Callum, and son Brandon. Faheys have maintained this land since 1939, planting fruit trees in the 1950s. Today the 100-acre farm has about 22,500 fruit trees, producing apples, peaches, nectarines and persimmons. About a decade ago, the family diversified into making cider from their apples. Their craft brews have gone on to win international awards.

Glenn is also highly regarded for his volunteer service, having captained the Darkes Forest Rural Fire Brigade for many years.

Glenbernie Orchard is the only remaining commercial fruit farm in the Illawarra and under Glenn and Jo's leadership the farm has kept close ties with the community, holding annual Apple Pie competitions, donating to the Stanwell Park CWA branch and giving many children the chance to pick their first apple or ride their first tractor.

However, farming is a business that never stops and Glenn's brother says that while his family are doing their best – with "the incredible team" stepping up to help keep the orchard and its farm store going – the pressure is "enormous".

Glenbernie's neighbours at Darkes Forest Riding Ranch, another long-time family business, have added their voice to appeals for support: "If you've called in for a cider or bag of apples after your ride you've certainly seen Glenn Fahey on a tractor or pouring your beverage. To think of the heartache and stress the Faheys are currently experiencing is all too hard to comprehend. The work must still be done, the show must go on. Please consider a donation or a simple share ..."

The Glenbernie team said locals can also help by visiting the orchard, buying fruit, jam, vinegar, honey, juice or cider online or from the farm shop.

"The shop and kitchen are still open, the cider is still cold, and orders are still being packed and delivered," they posted on Facebook.

"Behind the scenes, the work continues – picking, packing, irrigating, fixing netting, and doing all the things that keep this farm going."

Search for 'Support Glenn through Grade 4 Glioblastoma treatment' at [GoFundMe.com](https://www.gofundme.com/orchard) or shop online at www.darkes.com.au 🍎

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MP hails local show of solidarity

By Genevieve Swart

In the days after December's Bondi terrorist attack, in our parks and on our beaches, people across the Illawarra came together to honour the 15 innocent lives taken. On Thursday, January 22, Australians again gathered in a show of solidarity, lighting candles and joining a minute's silence at 7.01pm. Flags were flown at half-mast and people were urged to undertake mitzvahs (acts of kindness) for Bondi's Jewish community.

Ahead of the National Day of Mourning, Cunningham MP Alison Byrnes expressed her sorrow and condolences in a speech to Federal Parliament. She thanked Dr Yoke Berry, from the Wollongong Jewish Community, for organising a public Chanukah ceremony in Stuart Park on December 21. "One week after the Bondi attack, on the National Day of Reflection, I attended the lighting of the Menorah with the Jewish Community of Wollongong, along with local leaders from all faiths," Ms Byrnes said.

"Nepalese, Indian, Vietnamese, Buddhist monks, and a First Nations pastor, as well as members of the Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra, the Salvation Army, the Member for

Whitlam, the Member for Wollongong, the Deputy Mayor and local councillors, and Wollongong Area Commander Superintendent Karen Cook, local police and many members of our community. We all stood together as one with our Jewish community, as Rabbi Menachem Aron spread a message of love, light and kindness.

"It was a display of solidarity and of shared grief demonstrating that we will not allow hate to define who we are or how we gather."

The theme for January's National Day of Mourning was 'Light will Win – a Gathering of Unity and Remembrance'.

"We must use the light to guide us from this dark period," Ms Byrnes told parliament, "and we must use the light to help us stamp out hate in all its forms in all parts of our community." ✨



At top: Rabbi Menachem Aron welcomed a crowd of many faiths to the Chanukah event at Stuart Park on December 21. Lifesavers across the nation – including at Thirroul, Coalcliff and Wollongong– stood shoulder to shoulder in a show of solidarity. Photos: Illawarra Flame, John Dryden, Eric Hahn, Jeremy Lasek





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The Planetarium vs The Murcutt Herbarium

By architect Ben Wollen

Anyone who's been to the Kew Gardens in London knows how good a herbarium can be. In particular, the glazed palm house is spectacular. Walking in from a grey ol' Blighty day outside, one is transported into a tropical paradise that feels more like Singapore.

Besides the remarkable plant collection, the architecture housing it is a Victorian wrought iron miracle of its day. Built in the middle of the 19th Century, it is truly a marvel of early steel engineering. According to the Kew Gardens website, it has 1600 panes of glass. (Can't resist a dad joke here, but that would be a real pain in the glass!)

Planetariums are also a fantastic building type that I would argue rival the herbarium. Any building that with "ium" is, in my mind, fantastical – except perhaps a crematorium, best avoid that one!

I feel that planetariums, once upon a time, were probably the monorails of a particular era when cities would compete on who was the most advanced and required a concrete dome on the city skyline for evidence. In my mind, they are Science's answer to the great domed churches of the past. In church we would look up to the dome for God. In the planetarium, God was replaced with the stars – one heavenly body replaced with several!

Well, did you know that we may have missed out on a Glenn Murcutt-designed herbarium as a result of Wollongong Council attempting to get extra funding for a planetarium?

Recent research by Dr Bess Moylan uncovered some remarkable plans by Murcutt for a visitor centre and herbarium located to the northern boundary of Wollongong Botanic Garden, probably just off Northfields Avenue. Along with remarkable drawings from the 1980s, she also uncovered correspondence from the council to Murcutt, Australia's most internationally renowned architect, as well as a press clipping that would indicate that extra funding was being sought to allow for a planetarium.

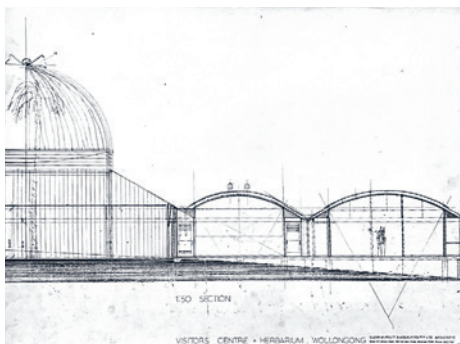
It is unclear whether the planetarium would be incorporated with the herbarium or that Glenn would be engaged to design it, but it does intimate that funding for the herbarium was deferred by council so that it could negotiate a planetarium in the deal. From all evidence on-site, that funding never came through.

From the limited amount of correspondence I



have been privy to, it would seem that documentation for the herbarium reached about one-third of the way through when council advised to wrap up final sketch drawings. The building itself looked fairly typical of Glenn's early work, with a series of long pavilions with curved roofs in front of a glazed dome that would house the tropical plants, with tall palm trees indicated on his drawings.

The floorplan included a small auditorium, an internal courtyard, a library, a laboratory, a gallery space, a series of office suites and a large covered balcony all set out on a ~3m grid. Looking over the drawings, I can only imagine what a wonderful addition to the Botanic Gardens this would have been. Opportunity lost! In their search for the stars, the council lost sight of more proximate earthly delights – a common mistake we humans seem to make! ✨



Top: Plans by Pritzker Prize-winning Glenn Murcutt, found at NSW State Library.
Above: What a herbarium might have looked like, according to Gemini AI

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Hopes dashed in pool 'bellyflop'

By Genevieve Swart

On January 1, local dad Scott Spiers headed over to Helensburgh Pool, but he didn't bother taking his swimmers.

"I had been monitoring it, but you could tell that it wasn't going to be open," he said.

"There's trees that have been planted that were protruding partially from the ground, deteriorating grass that's dying, not being watered. The place is just littered with piles of dirt and materials..."

On January 16, swimmers' fears about the project's progress were confirmed when Wollongong City Council announced late Friday that, due to a supply chain problem and a delay in the delivery of essential tiles, the pool would not reopen until "mid-to-late February 2026".

For months – since local GP Dr Trevor Kemper raised the spectre of a "cruel" summer pool closure and criticised council for not planning works over winter – anger has been building over the management of Helensburgh Pool.

With the late reopening affecting school swim carnivals, Helensburgh locals vented frustration on council's Facebook page. "Is this a joke?" asked one; "incredibly disappointing" said another. One parent said the project had been "terribly handled" and advised people to "let council know how unhappy you are with your vote".

Scott described the delay as another "bellyflop" by council in the three-year-long pool saga.

In November 2022, Wollongong City Council received \$3.2 million in state funding for Helensburgh sports facilities – including sports field lights and swimming pool repairs – but council did not start work on the pool until almost three years later, in August 2025.

Refurbishment of the bushland town's pool has included fixing up the 25m and toddlers' pools via structural remediation, resealing the construction joints, a full repaint and retiling. New shade sails, bubblers and sandstone seating are also in the upgrade. The deadline for spending the state grant – from the NSW Office of Sport's Multisport

Community Facility Fund – was 30 December 2025 and Council told residents works would be complete by the "January summer peak".

The 40 people who attended Neighbourhood Forum 1's November 12 meeting heard that the pool project was on track and had three wet weather days up its sleeve. In January, the group's volunteer convenor, Warwick Erwin, said: "The council have lost the trust of the community. This project should have been done two winters ago."

Dr Kemper, owner of the town's largest medical practice, Equilibrium Healthcare, agreed trust has been lost. "It's abysmal planning and a very poor outcome. "We are increasingly feeling like a neglected outpost that nobody cares about ...

"We clearly welcome investment in community facilities and infrastructure but to date the promises have far exceeded delivery and the level of care well below what ratepayers deserve."

Feelings have run high over the pool, and not only because residents have missed their local free swim spot. "It's not just a pool. It's a lifeline and it's a community hub," Scott said.

Dr Kemper highlighted the impact on community health. "I have patients who I have been recommending water-based activity all season. Many have been unable to do anything because there is nothing accessible for them nearby and as a result their health has deteriorated.

"If the council is serious about it looking after the community they should be opening the pool year round."

In announcing the delay last month, Lord Mayor Tania Brown said council had "looked at every option we can to claw back time" after the tiles' delivery delay. "We appreciate the community bearing with us and enduring some short-term pain for a long-term gain."

Council is calling for feedback on its aquatics and indoor sports survey, giving residents a chance to drive strategy for the next 20 years. Send feedback via council's website by 8 February. 🌟



L-R: Catherine Ryan, Dr Trevor Kemper and Warwick Erwin, who said works "should have been done two winters ago".



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Dr Rip's Science of the Surf

It's time to increase funding to Council Lifeguards, writes Prof Rob Brander

In early January I witnessed the aftermath of a near drowning at Sandon Point. The Council lifeguard and multiple paramedics were treating a teenage boy who had been caught in a rip current and rescued by surfers. It was an emotional incident for family, friends and bystanders and while the boy was okay, such a close call raises several important questions about how we patrol our beaches and where beach safety funding should be directed.

Sandon Point Beach is approximately 900 metres long and is patrolled by Council lifeguards and volunteer surf lifesavers with the red and yellow flags typically set up close to the surf lifesaving club at the northern end of the beach.

However, many people swim along the unpatrolled middle and southern section where there is ample parking and easy access – and usually several rip currents.

The lifeguards and lifesavers do regular roving patrols along this unpatrolled section, but after the boy had recovered, I spoke to the lifeguard who said that Council wanted to have an additional lifeguard stationed permanently there, but did not have enough funding to make this happen. This is a problem not only for Wollongong City Council, but for many other Councils along the NSW coast.

Councils simply do not have enough funding to extend their beach lifeguard services.

Despite the ubiquitous presence of lifeguards on our beaches and 18 seasons of *Bondi Rescue*, many people don't understand the difference between Council lifeguards, who are paid professionals and in Wollongong patrol through the week and Saturdays and wear white and blue uniforms), and surf lifesavers, who are volunteers that patrol on



weekends and public holidays during the extended summer season and wear red and yellow uniforms. A recent report by my UNSW Beach Safety Research Group showed that in a financial year, Council Lifeguards are solely responsible for patrolling NSW beaches 77% of the time compared to 14% for volunteer lifesavers. The rest of the time both services operate together. These numbers are similar for Wollongong beaches. Lifeguards are clearly the backbone of beach safety in NSW.

Both services are incredibly valuable for keeping our beaches safe. However, while Surf Life Saving NSW traditionally receives significant funding from the NSW Government, most recently a record four-year \$72 million funding investment, there is no external funding available to Councils to extend lifeguard patrol hours and add additional lifeguards on both patrolled and unpatrolled beaches. Given that rates of beach drowning in NSW are rising, I would argue that if we really want to get serious about reducing beach drowning, it's time to increase funding available to Council beach lifeguard services.

Wollongong City Council is seeking input ahead of drafting their 20-year Beach Services and Surf Sports via a survey that includes a question about your satisfaction with patrolled lifeguard services. If you think that having extended lifeguard hours and more lifeguards on beaches is a good idea, you can have your say via council's website by Sunday, 8 February.

Go to <https://our.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/beach-services-and-surf-sports-strategy> 🌟





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- Extension studies were undertaken by 50% of Year 12

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Time to Volunteer

Janice Creenaune meets Joe Lane, a retired agricultural consultant and wool and pastoral science lecturer. He volunteers his time and energy with the NIU3A movement, Meals on Wheels and as a community transport driver



Joe Lane has immense energy and is willing to give to others in many directions.

His volunteer opportunities allow his breadth of working and living experiences to keep expanding. Joe moved to the Illawarra (after escaping Sydney) 18 years ago and found the Northern

Illawarra University of the 3rd Age (NIU3A) to be exactly what he needed.

"My wife, Jenny and I, have lived and worked abroad in India, China and Indonesia for many years – and also Lockhart near Wagga Wagga proved influential for my upbringing and early experiences – but coming to the northern Illawarra, I found another home," Joe said.

"I am well aware of how fortunate I have been

and volunteering allows me to give back to others, that just may need a little hand up occasionally."

As part of NIU3A, Joe organises weekly talks at Thirroul Community Centre each Wednesday at 9:30am (during school term).

"I am always open to hear of interesting speakers. Some come from the experiences of our group, such as Frank Nowlan, who may talk on art, or health or history, or another local like Maurie Mulheron, who examines music and entertains at the same time."

Joe is also integral in Northern Illawarra Neighbour Aid (NINA), driving buses which enable many, particularly the elderly, to socialise, shop or attend doctor's appointments. NINA has different size buses (a 22-seater, a 15-seater and a car), but also relies on volunteers using their own vehicles, for which they are recompensed.

"It enables some who are house-bound to easily get out and remain with friendships etc," Joe said.

"The conversations on the buses are always lively as many meet up each week. Sometimes they are dropped at Thirroul Bowling Club for lunch, a drink and maybe some games, and once there was a portrait artist, who was wonderful. It is the relationships that are most important and they want to hear about each other's grandchildren etc."

Joe also helps deliver food through the Northern Illawarra Meals on Wheels Association.

"I drive and deliver meals for those in need in the local area and it all provides a service, but it certainly keeps me active and busy," he said. ✨

What's on at U3A

Wednesday Talks Program at Thirroul
Visit www.northernillawarra.u3anet.org.au

4 Feb Aileen Harland: Voices of Protest: Protests & Revolutionary Song

11 Feb Helen Wilson: Illawarra Folk Festival

18 Feb Judy Bull: What really happened to Anastasia?

25 Feb Maryanne Stuart, State Member for Heathcote: State-based issues

4 March Cherry Hardaker: Knitting Nannas

11 March NSW Seniors Open Day: A Showcase of U3A activities

18 March U3A v Bulli High School Debate: That there should be a sugar tax

25 March Thirroul Seaside Festival: no Wed talk

NIU3A Film Appreciation Group

4 Feb *The Crying Game*, UK, Japan, 1992

11 Feb *The Covered Wagon*, USA, 1923, silent film

18 Feb *The Earrings of Madame De*, France, Italy, 1953, starring Charles Boyer

25 Feb *Scent of a Woman*, USA, 1992, Al Pacino

4 March *The Story of the Weeping Camel*, Germany, Mongolia, 2003, a docudrama

11 March *Frida*, USA, 2002, about Frida Kahlo

18 March *Brazil*, UK, USA, 1985, starring Jonathan Pryce & Robert de Niro

25 March *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* USA, 2000

Stanwell Park U3A Term 1 Program

Monday talks from 9.30 to 10.30am, Morning Tea till 11am, then Music Appreciation till noon. All are welcome to attend at Hillcrest House behind Kennett Home, 1A Railway Street, Stanwell Park. Contact Jenny on 0406 350 025.

2 Feb SBS, *The Point*- Uluru Handback

9 Feb What is Art, with examples, Wendy Leathem

16 Feb My Trip to Vietnam, Anne Brown

23 Feb TBA, Jim Powell

2 March Mysterious Maritime Mysteries, with Mike Traynor

9 March What did You do During the War Mummy?, Kerrie Anne Christian

16 March Crossing the Gobi Desert, Roy Lawrie

23 March Raja Ampat and the Spice Islands, David Christian. ✨

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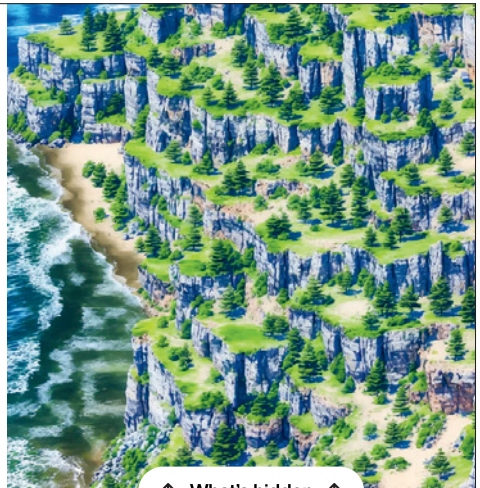
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Battle for Scarborough pub parking spills out into the streets

By Jeremy Lasek

Everyone's heard of the Aussie pub with no beer. In Wollongong's far northern suburbs, while the beer is in plentiful supply, everyone it seems is talking about the pub with little or no parking.

The historic Scarborough Hotel, officially opened in 1887 when most thirsty patrons arrived by horse and buggy, is now recognised as Wollongong's oldest licensed premises.

Its popularity, for close to 140 years, has meant finding a place to park has always been a challenge. Problem is, finding a place to park today is more difficult than ever and may get worse.

In days gone by, for many of us who head to the Scarborough Pub for lunch or a cool drink, we'd hope to jag a parking spot on a large area of gravel just to the north of the hotel. Most of us assumed this informal parking area was owned by the pub. We were wrong.

About six years ago, Paul Anzani saw a great opportunity to buy that prime piece of real estate from Rio Tinto when the company started off-loading some of its non-mining assets. Paul knew that land well. For 13 years he was licensee at the Scarborough, working for the pub's long-time owner, billionaire WIN TV owner Bruce Gordon.

When Bruce decided to sell the hotel nearly two years ago, he agreed to list the pub and the adjoining land for sale with Colliers, but offered to the market separately.

Epochal paid \$9.5 million for the pub but, according to Paul Anzani, the new owners said the adjoining land, used over all those years as the hotel's unofficial carpark, was "surplus to requirements".

"They ended up offering me a paltry amount. They wanted me to effectively give it away for

\$200,000," Paul said. "They gave me all sorts of environmentally sensitive excuses, but it was a slap in the face as far as I was concerned."

Paul said he believed the land, measuring close to 4400 square metres, much of it cliff face, was worth "much closer to a million dollars".

The land Paul owns is now fenced off to the public and has been listed for sale, seeking expressions of interest as "residential land" on the open market. A realestate.com advertisement describes the site as "an elevated setting on Scarborough cliffs with ocean and sunrise panoramas", and its C3 environmental zoning "permits temporary structures, wheeled cabins or eco-living homes".

Paul said he was still happy to negotiate a "fair and reasonable price" with the hotel's new owners, saying the land to the north of the hotel could easily accommodate up to 60 vehicles.

The pub's new owners have hit back, saying: "Due to its environmental zoning, the land cannot be developed or used for parking. As such, Epochal Hotels offered fair market value based on its current zoning and permitted use, recognising that it has no practical development or operational capacity."

In a statement, Epochal said it has raised concerns with Wollongong City Council over the fenced-off area, claiming the fencing in question extends beyond the owner's property boundary and onto public land. "Our understanding is that individuals do not have the right to fence or obstruct public land without Council approval. We have asked Council to confirm whether the appropriate permissions are in place and, if not, to take the necessary steps to resolve the matter. The fencing has restricted public access and altered the amenity of a well-used public area, prompting concerns from locals and visitors."

Paul Anzani fears the current parking problems could go from bad to worse. Epochal has lodged a Development Application with Wollongong City Council for more than \$2 million of works, which would see the addition of a new outdoor kitchen, bar and a cabana area. Epochal says "no parking is being removed as part of this proposal".

The Flame understands Epochal Hotels has filed a Class 1 deemed refusal appeal for the DA with the NSW Land and Environment Court, with the matter listed for a first direction on 9 February. This effectively takes the matter out of Council or the independent Wollongong Planning Panel's hands. 🍷





In memory of Joe Vezgoff

By Will Lee, president of Austinmer
Thirroul RSL Sub-Branch

Joe Vezgoff, a long-term active member of Austinmer Thirroul RSL Sub-Branch, passed away on 31st December 2025 aged 97.

Joe enlisted in the Army in early 1950 and had Operational Service in Japan, Korea, Malaya, Vietnam and Singapore.

In 1950 Joe was posted to Japan as part of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force, later that year he was posted to Korea. He fought in the legendary battle of Kapyong, where his unit was awarded the US Presidential Unit Citation for outstanding bravery and at Maryang San where Joe was badly wounded days before he was due to return home, having served over 370 days in the Korean War.

In 1955 Joe was posted to the Australian Army Visitors and Observers Unit Malaya where he served for the next 721 days.

On returning from Malaya in 1957 Joe was posted to 2RAR, The Army Infantry Centre and 1 Recruit Training Battalion, by this time he had been promoted to Warrant Officer Class 2.

In 1962 Joe was one of the first 30 Australians to go to Vietnam with the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam. Joe was in Vietnam for 380 days.

Returning to Australia in 1963, Joe was posted to Office Cadet Training School at Portsea, having been promoted to Warrant Officer Class 1 and then posted to Army Headquarters.

Joe remained on Australian Army Emergency Reserve from June 1970 to June 1977.

Following his military life, Joe worked for BHP at Port Kembla and Westernport Victoria. He was also a very keen artist and well known in the local art world. 🌟



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Honk! was a blast

Morning temperatures of 35°C didn't stop the HONK! Oz Grand Street Parade for Peace going ahead on Saturday, January 10, when hundreds gathered at Crown Street mall in colourful costumes, instruments in hand and ready to dance their way to the city's arts precinct.

This year's HONK! Oz festival brought performers from all around Australia to enjoy Wollongong's vibrant music, art and activism. Local group the Femme Fatales celebrated 10 years of HONK! Oz with a femmbrella-making workshop on Friday, delivering much-needed shade for the parade.

Christine of The Femme Fatales summed it up: "Everyone can participate in some way, musically or with art. You don't have to be a professional musician. It's about having fun and joy on the streets, taking up public space. Fun, creativity.

"Delilah has something on her umbrella, which I think is totally true, which says 'music mends'. I think that is so true for all of us. Music helps us cope with stress, you know, the frightening things happening in the world; music gives us the motivation to keep going." ✨



Adopt purple pose

By Tyneesha Williams

If you're out and about in Corrimal on a Friday and you see residents and retailers in purple, the choice of colour is probably not an accident. Rotary Corrimal has launched its Purple Friday initiative in 2026, turning local businesses into year-round advocates for respectful relationships with a visible splash of purple every Friday. Club president Linda Bunclark said the campaign was about people speaking out rather than standing by. "By raising awareness through things like Purple Friday, we hope to eventually reduce the level of violence that leads to these tragic outcomes," Linda said.

Meet the Rotary Club outside Service NSW in Corrimal at their free BBQ on the first Friday of each month. To buy a purple shirt, contact 0403 732 505 or secretary@corrimalrotary.org.au ✨

Meet Shellie the food truck

By Genevieve Swart

Need a Feed CEO Shaz Harrison will be celebrating a full-circle moment when she drives the charity's new food truck into Berkeley Community Centre this month.

"Shellie officially starts rolling with a soft launch on the 3rd February, where we will be hosting our first community lunch in Berkeley," Shaz said. "Our official launch will be on the 3rd of March at Berkeley Community Centre, which feels really special, because that's where Need a Feed held its very first event 13 years ago!"

Driving Shellie around the region will help Shaz fulfil a long-held dream to expand their services and provide not just food but connection.

"We're strengthening our partnership with Berkeley Community Centre, providing regular lunches, and taking the food truck on location to community centres, our partner organisations and schools," she said.

"We will prepare meals on-site, which means we are not just handing out food, we're connecting in real time, having conversations and building trust."

Shellie was already a food truck, so needed only a few improvements when Need a Feed acquired her. The purchase follows more than a year of

fundraising, from a GoFundMe campaign to last August's Swim Challenge, supported by Wollongong Lord Mayor Tania Brown and held at UOW's Aquatic Centre.

Shaz thanks everyone who pitched in.

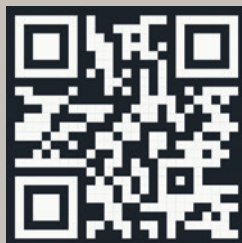
"From sponsors, right through to community members collecting cans and bottles so we could cash them in, every single bit mattered. We're beyond thankful, we're proud, and pretty stoked."

"Every trip means meals are going out where they are needed, we are creating real connections with people doing it tough."

To make tax-deductible donations or sponsor Need a Feed events, go to needafeed.org 🌟



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Flying fox pups in care as hundreds perish

By Amanda De George

Hundreds of grey-headed flying foxes (*Pteropus poliocephalus*), a threatened species, and black flying foxes (*Pteropus alecto*) died in last month's heatwave, with temperatures topping 40°C on Saturday, January 10. Dozens of pups were orphaned and taken into care.

It's no secret that I'm a huge fan of these important pollinators who keep our east coast forests safe and look adorable while doing it. As the temperature climbed, I was sick with worry for our local camp but the reality was worse than expected.

In Dapto, about 500 bats died, while another 170 deaths were recorded at a camp in Figtree. WIRES said more deaths were expected in days after the heat subsided as animals struggled to recover from the effects of severe heat stress and the availability of good quality food resources as rains moved in.

The black flying foxes were hit hardest.

WIRES NSW bat coordinator Storm Stanford said the black species were tropical animals and less adapted to temperate zones.

"They're about the same size [as grey-headed flying foxes] – they eat probably more fruit and less blossom than the greys, and the greys are the flying fox species most adapted to live in southern conditions," Storm said.

Habitat destruction has been forcing black flying foxes further south to higher temperatures and lower humidity than they're adapted to as they search of food and shelter.

"They've been coming down the coast, and the reason for that – and the reason why grey-headed flying foxes are in trouble too – is habitat destruction," Storm said. "And as there's less habitat that blacks prefer to live in, they come into less



Deceased flying foxes were recovered from Figtree and Dapto, and orphaned flying foxes have been taken into care by WIRES volunteers. Photos: Rebecca Daly, WIRES

ideal places, which is further down the coast."

After the heatwave, WIRES volunteer Rebecca Daly went to the Figtree and Dapto camps to rescue surviving bats, collect bodies and save orphaned pups. "It's hard to know what it's like until you're seeing it – that kind of devastation on that scale is really quite confronting. And wildlife rescue generally can really be quite traumatic.

"We kind of felt like we haven't experienced it like this before and it's a bit of a shock to the system. We've got a lot of carers now doing around-the-clock care for the ones that have come in. They're just flat-out now."

If you find a sick, injured or grounded bat, do not touch it. Contact WIRES and a trained and vaccinated bat rescuer to attend.

Call WIRES on 1300 094 737 🌟

Frog of the Month

By Ewan Auld



Southern leaf green tree frog (*Litoria nudidigitus*)

The first frog of the month is the Southern leaf green tree frog. This small to medium-sized treefrog species is quite common along south-eastern areas of Australia, including the Illawarra. During their spring and summer breeding season, this species can be found along fast-flowing streams and creeks bordered by dense forest. Their distinctive call involves an introductory, high-pitched "reeeek", followed by successive lower-pitched croaks. In the Illawarra, they are regularly found on many of our local creeks that flow down from the escarpment. I captured this photo on a warm night along the lower section of Hargraves Creek in Stanwell Park. While there were several males calling hidden in the leaf litter, this male was perched nicely on a mossy rock while he called, making for a good photo. 🌟

ADHD and Autism in Australia

By Dr Helen Maclean of Bulli Medical Practice

Rates of ADHD and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) appear to be rapidly increasing here and around the world. But what is driving this apparent rise?

Access to information is greater than ever. This undoubtedly comes with pros and cons, but when it comes to understanding neurodiversity, it has been extremely powerful.

Back in the 1970s, 80s, and even into the 90s, ADHD and ASD were not understood like they are today. ADHD was largely studied in young boys, so the diagnostic criteria was modelled on what we saw in (mostly) hyperactive boys. Girls tend to present differently – they are often inattentive, have high levels of masking, and symptoms often become apparent at a slightly older age, typically around puberty. This led to many cases being missed until much later in life.

Girls, and therefore women, were often undiagnosed or misdiagnosed as having anxiety, depression, personality disorders or even psychotic illnesses such as bipolar disorder. Being undiagnosed and untreated can lead to



increased risk of other mental health issues, including substance abuse, eating disorders, higher rates of self-harm, incarceration, and even suicide.

With increasing awareness and education – after seeing their own children or family members diagnosed, after years of wondering why certain treatments haven't worked – individuals are now learning that their struggles may in fact have a reason.

Women also find that coping mechanisms built over the years no longer seem effective as they reach certain life stages. Having children, perimenopause, and menopause are all times when women often present for help.

Understanding how your autistic or ADHD brain works is extremely important and powerful. Acceptance, being kind to yourself, lowering demands, and finding the right treatment options are all vital. The government is increasing the ability of General Practice to diagnose and treat ADHD and we're here to help. Call 4284 4622 for an appointment. 🌟

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Who wants to save community hall

By Genevieve Swart

Helensburgh's old community hall looks like something from a time capsule of a disaster zone.

"It's got kids' toys scattered on the floor, it looks like people just got up and walked out and the thing was barricaded," says Gavin Little, the spokesperson for 2508 Collaborate, newly formed to stop the demolition of the community asset.

"It's heartbreaking when you see it, because you're not seeing an empty hall, you're seeing a community space ... it's quite a telling photo."

Founded late last year, the group of 30 to 40 residents from the 2508 postcode have already letterboxed the district, created a survey, a logo and a website. Their campaign to save the old hall comes just as Wollongong City Council looked to have wrapped up seven years of planning and hired local Sherson Architecture to design a new centre and library across the road at 53-55 Walker Street.

But 2508 Collaborate members – many of whom only learned of plans to demolish the old hall at November's Neighbourhood Forum 1 meeting – oppose council taking a wrecking ball to the centre, despite its history of damp and mould.

"We don't think this thing needs to be knocked over," Gavin said, "and the fact that they're refusing to share any information with us makes us think that maybe there's more to this story."

The group has launched a 12-question survey to "genuinely engage" with the community.

"We've got over 300 responses," Gavin said.

"We're aiming to hit 500 or 600 at least. The vast majority, I would say, share our sentiments. The loss

of amenity and loss of community space by tearing down the hall is unnecessary and Council's plans to date are not a like-for-like replacement."

Neighbourhood Forum 1's volunteer convenor Warwick Erwin said he's been asking council to share reports on the centre – officially shuttered in December 2021 – for a decade. "The hall's not at its end of life. Council have lacked maintenance, lacked the ability to repair it," Warwick said. "I'm glad 2508 Collaborate are taking it up."

Both NF1 and the new group are calling for an independent assessment.

2508 Collaborate comprises parents, young professionals and retirees, and the group wants to engage with council in a positive fashion. "We're not asking them for anything extra," Gavin said.

"We're just asking them to not destroy what we have ... please don't put a bulldozer through it. This is something the community cares about."

Check out the survey at 2508collaborate.info 🌟



The new Northern Illawarra Creative Collective is planning its first event of the year, a "Make a Scene night" at the Tradies Helensburgh on February 21.

The evening will include open mic slots, a pub choir singalong, a line dancing demo, a speed painting demo and auction, a DJ set

and Lonely Arts, a 'lonely hearts'-style callout for would-be collaborators. "This interactive event aims to build and connect our NICC community," says co-founder Jane Jukes.

The NICC launched with a band night in November. "We aim to host and promote events and arts initiatives," Jane says. "People are desperate for local events to attend and we have so many talented people living locally who currently 'do their thing' elsewhere. The NICC's mission is to kick-start a scene and change the perception that art happens south of the sea-bridge!"

A youth battle of the bands is also planned. Other ideas are for a film comp, comedy night, art show, poetry in the park, flashmob busking and a winter lantern display.

Join the The Northern Illawarra Creative Collective group on Facebook. 🌟

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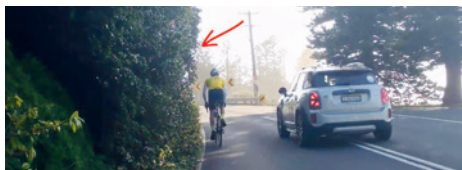


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Thirroul Village Committee Update

By Annette Jones, secretary of the TVC



Overgrown vegetation on LHD, Austinmer

Residents will have noticed that there is overgrown vegetation on Lawrence Hargrave Drive between Toxteth and Boyce avenues in Austinmer. This makes cycling a hazardous activity. The TVC contacted the Member for Heathcote, Maryanne Stuart, and she forwarded the matter to the Minister for Roads, Hon Jenny Aitchison. Council plans to cut back the vegetation in early 2026, after writing to residents and Transport for NSW (TfNSW) for a road access permit. It is anticipated the work will be done at night when traffic is light.

Thirroul Skatepark

The latest on the skatepark from Council is that with the W.F. Jackson Park site now adopted, next steps will be to “refine the project planning to incorporating feedback received during community engagement. This will help finalise scoping of the new skate park, technical

specifications and budget refinements to enable progression of procurement of a suitable contractor to design and construct the new skatepark in 2026/27 financial year”.

Survey on pools and indoor sports facilities

Wollongong City Council has a survey about its pools and sports centres that will drive a 20-year Aquatic and Indoor Sport Strategy. If you love these important resources, please have your say by 8 February 2026. Go to <https://our.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/aquatics-and-indoor-sports-strategy>

Bulli Bypass

The TVC contacted Maryanne Stuart requesting a copy of the report upon which TfNSW based its decision to not continue to investigate bypass options via the escarpment to the M1 Princes Motorway or Bulli Pass. TfNSW stated that as a result of the steep terrain and history of underground coal mining such construction would be difficult, disruptive and expensive. Maryanne has requested TfNSW conduct consultation and information sessions. Watch this space.

Next TVC meeting: Sunday, 1 March, 4pm, TRIPS Hall, Railway Parade, Thirroul 📍

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. Residents of Neighbourhood Forum 3 area (Woonona, Bulli, Thirroul and Austinmer) are welcome to attend NIRAG meetings.

6–10 Southview St, Bulli

A public meeting organised by Heathcote MP Maryanne Stuart to discuss Homes NSW’s proposal to replace 3 existing homes on Southview St was held at the Sandon Point Surf Club in December. The CEO of Homes NSW, Rebecca Pinkerton, attended and we are hopeful that Maryanne’s efforts to strongly advocate over residents’ concerns – that R2 zone 2-storey limit be observed – will result in a better outcome. There has been no feedback from Homes NSW to date. With strong leadership this project could be approved in a way that demonstrates how social housing can be integrated with private homes.

Amy Street, Thirroul: DA 2025/374

NIRAG met with WCC GM Greg Doyle last year re: this vital Green Corridor and Council is now reviewing the strategic need for, and alternatives for public ownership. A rezoning of part of the C2 land to C4 (Environmental Living) could be a way to move forward (at no cost to ratepayers).

Draft Illawarra Shoalhaven Strategic Regional Integrated Transport Plan (SRITP)

Transport for NSW wants feedback by 6 February. We would like to see better frequency or speed of rail connections (locally or to Sydney) or improvements to public transport in our local area. Make a submission online or email engage.sritps@transport.nsw.gov.au

Next NIRAG quarterly meeting: Wednesday, 11 February at 7pm upstairs in the Bulli Community Centre. All welcome. Contact Ross Dearden via email at nirag@bigpond.com 📍

A portrait of Alison Byrnes MP, a woman with long brown hair, smiling and wearing a red top.

Alison Byrnes MP

Labor Member for Cunningham

If you have any issues relating to the federal government and require assistance, please do not hesitate to contact my office on 4228 5899, email Alison.Byrnes.MP@aph.gov.au or come in at 74 Crown Street Wollongong.

Keep up to date by following me on Facebook! →



Authorised by Alison Byrnes MP, ALP, Wollongong

Photo credit: Destination NSW

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A portrait of Maryanne Stuart MP, a woman with short blonde hair, smiling and wearing a light blue blazer over a white top.

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A scenic background image showing a winding coastal road along a cliff overlooking the ocean under a cloudy sky.

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AUTHORISED BY MARYANNE STUART MP, SHOPS 1 & 2 17 - 23 STATION STREET ENGADINE NSW 2233. FUNDED USING PARLIAMENTARY ENTITLEMENTS.

Writers face 'broader surge in censorship'

By Genevieve Swart

Following the collapse of Adelaide Writers' Week, a local literary director has warned the threat to freedom of expression is not a one-off in the arts.

More than 180 speakers boycotted the country's largest writers' event after the Adelaide Festival board disinvited Palestinian-Australian author Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah, claiming her appearance would be "culturally insensitive" after the Bondi massacre. The 2026 writers' week has since been cancelled and an apology issued, but the controversy casts a long shadow.

"It reflects a broader surge in censorship in Australian creative arts that's been impacting artists, arts organisations, and events over the last two years," said Dr Sarah Nicholson, director of the South Coast Writers Centre.

"There are many examples. Some of the most prominent include Creative Australia who revoked (and later reinstated) Khaled Sabsabi's appointment as Australia's representative to the Venice Biennale and the State Library of Queensland's cancellation of K.A. Ren Wyl'd's literary fellowship, both due to lobbying based on perceptions around their personal politics.

"Most pertinently in 2025 the Bendigo Writers Festival effectively collapsed after it tried to enforce a code of conduct on their guests, effectively prohibiting them from criticising Israel, causing a significant writer boycott of the event."

SCWC has "so far" not run up against external pressure to censor its programming, Sarah said.

Last year, the not-for-profit organisation – run by a team of three, who work part-time from a basement office at Coledale Hall – successfully held two major festivals in July and November. SCWC hosted challenging conversations and strong

line-ups, with authors including Amy Remeikis, Jan Fran and Professor Clare Wright, who gave True Story festival's keynote in November, sharing the story behind the *ṇāku dhāruk* (bark petitions) by the Yolngu people of Arnhem Land. Afterwards, the Stella Prize-winner praised artistic director Caroline Baum for curating a "frank and fearless non-fiction festival".

"Great conversations on the stage, in the green room, on the foreshore, in the RSL," she said. "As it should be. Public engagement at its most honest and most civil. Build it and they will come."

In January Clare was among the authors who pulled out of Adelaide Writers' Week.

Sarah said, "A number of the writers who have withdrawn from the Adelaide Writers Festival in solidarity with Randa Abdel-Fattah have appeared at either South Coast Readers and Writers Festival or True Story festival in recent years, including: Jane Caro, Clare Wright, Larissa Behrendt, James Bradley, Bri Lee, Cam Wilson, Ariel Bogle, Tim Ayliffe, Amy Remeikis, and local authors Sue Turnbull and Lucy Nelson."

After a week of resignations and recriminations, the Adelaide Festival Corporation apologised to Dr Abdel-Fattah and invited her to speak at its next event, issuing a statement saying: "Intellectual and artistic freedom is a powerful human right."

The question now is how to ensure independent public debate can continue to thrive – and SCWC has already decided this will be a key topic on its next program.

"At the 2026 South Coast Readers and Writers Festival, which will happen over the weekend of July 25-26, our guests will be discussing the current political climate, the increasing censorship of Australian writers' voices and what we can do to protect our artistic freedom of speech," Sarah said.

What's On in February

SCWC will launch its poetry anthology, *34–37 Degrees South: Words/No Words* on Saturday, 7 February from 1pm in the Escarpment Room at Thirroul Library. Further south, Poetry at Port will be held on 21 February, from 1:30pm at Red Point Arts in Port Kembla. A handful of spots are available for an ekphrastic poetry workshop with local poet Ali Jane Smith on 14 February at Wollongong Art Gallery, held in conjunction with our 2026 Poetry Award. Submissions are open to all poets responding to the theme 'states', closing on 22 March.

Visit southcoastwriters.org 🌟



SCWC director Dr Sarah Nicholson.
Photo: Ironbark Photography

WollCon Junior String Quartet
performing in November at the Emerging
Artist Concert Series. Photo: Ironbark



Thanks to all music mentors

By Felicity Woodhill of Inspire Music Australia

Over the past 20 years, Wollongong has quietly developed a thriving culture of jazz, guitar, flute, and chamber ensembles, shaped by the sustained commitment of local musicians and educators.

Wollongong Conservatorium of Music has been a vital physical and artistic hub for nurturing, rehearsing, and sustaining these ensembles.

Flute ensembles have flourished under Suzanne Cowan, whose performance practice and teaching have encouraged collaborative flute playing as a core part of musical development. Guitar ensembles and chamber guitar music have similarly grown through the work of Nigel Jones, whose mentorship has expanded the visibility and ambition of guitar-based ensemble performance.

Jazz has remained a dynamic and essential strand of Wollongong's musical identity, championed by musicians such as Eric Dunan, whose work has fostered improvisation, experimentation, and community connection. In the chamber domain, among others, Tanya Phillips and Nigel Edwards have played a significant role through their long association with the BlueScope Youth Orchestra, developing generations of young string and wind players and ensembles.

Music-making in an ensemble fosters collaboration, listening and communication skills. For young people, it is also a chance to make friends. Some players go on to careers in national and international performance, and some become teachers. WollCon continues to provide not only rehearsal space but a cultural home. Thank you to all music teachers in Wollongong for their commitment to sharing the joy of making music.

Catch harpist Chloe Corbett in 'Sounds from Afar' at 11am, 5 February at Wollongong Art Gallery 🌟

Heart of the action

With the team at Collins Booksellers Thirroul



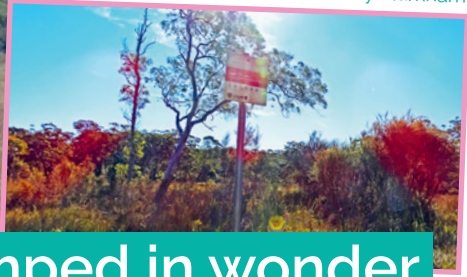
This year Valentine's Day falls on a Saturday, so come in and find your love a special book and spend the day lazily reading together. How romantic! Then change the tone a few days later at an author event at Ryan's Hotel on the 17th. Award-winning author Tim Ayliffe will be discussing his blistering new thriller, *Dark Desert Road*. Tim's novels have been informed by his 25-year global career as a journalist. He writes about crime, espionage, extremism and the global power games at play in the 21st century, and Sue Turnbull is the perfect conversation partner to dissect the book in a lively discussion. Bookings are essential – register on Humanitix. 🌟

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Activists swamped in wonder

By Genevieve Swart

One Sunday afternoon, not long after a damning report on US miner Peabody's plans to expand coalmining in the Woronora catchment, a group of nature lovers went for a walk in Darkes Forest. Their goal: to visit an upland swamp.

"Standing at the edge of an upland swamp – it's like seeing a whale breaching or the black cockatoos flying at dusk. You feel the power of this place," local poet Ali Jane Smith said.

Ali is part of grassroots group Protect Our Water Alliance (POWA), which invited members to join the Darkes Forest walk on November 30.

"We wanted to experience one of these beautiful, life-sustaining ecosystems," Ali said. "They store and clean the water that eventually flows through to the taps in our houses and out to the ocean we swim in and eat from."

Most coastal upland swamps are off-limits, with even bushwalkers forbidden from entering the sensitive catchment where they flourish. However, the government is considering allowing Peabody to expand coalmining in the Woronora Special Area, with a decision expected early this year.

Peabody's proposal, a State Significant Development, is to reconfigure an existing longwall, add a new one, dig a ventilation shaft and build a new access road west of its Metropolitan Mine in Helensburgh. The expansion would be on the Woronora Plateau, home to the Woronora Reservoir and Hacking River catchments.

Sydney Water data shows about 8500 people in Helensburgh, Otford, Stanwell Park and Coalcliff rely on the Woronora Dam for drinking water.

Water security was a key concern for WaterNSW and the Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Unconventional Gas Development and Large Coal Mining Development (IESC), which published feedback in November. Among eight key potential impacts of Peabody's project, the IESC report flagged "irreversible changes" to fauna, flora and ecological processes in swamps and "surface water diversion through new underground pathways that may degrade surface water quality".

Ali said: "It can be frustrating to know that the

Planning Minister [Paul Scully], our Member for Wollongong, could protect six swamps with a stroke of the pen – but I remain optimistic...

"Protecting the catchment would be the most extraordinary legacy a Planning Minister could have, I think. Preserving something so precious would be an act that's greater than building the Harbour Bridge or the Opera House, when you think about it. Generations to come would have reason to deeply appreciate something like that."

Many generations past have worked in Helensburgh's historic colliery, which dates from 1884, and local opinions on its future are mixed, with the Mining and Energy Union's submission describing the modification as a "sensible response to discovered geological challenges".

Peabody says the mine – which produces coal critical to Port Kembla steelworks – employs 400 people and its expansion will allow the colliery to operate until 2032, instead of closing in 2029.

Following 2025's consultation, NSW Planning received more than 200 submissions, including 140 objections, 75 in support and one comment (Wollongong City Council).

Unlike Sutherland City Council, where councillors unanimously opposed Peabody's plans, at August's Wollongong Council meeting, all eight Labor representatives voted down the Greens' motion for council to object.

"As a council, we need to stick up for our drinking water catchment," the Greens' Cr Jess Whittaker said. "There's been severe cracking of the Waratah Rivulet, and the company's feeble attempt to repair it with epoxy only shows that you can't glue a water catchment back together."

However, both Greens and Labor councillors admitted to finding the documentation, which ran to more than 700 pages, complex.

The IESC's report is easier reading. Its verdict comes in six succinct pages, ending with: "it is strongly recommended that the proponent avoid longwall mining below all Coastal Upland Swamps TECs [Threatened Ecological Communities] and waterways in the project area." 🌟


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Cover
feature

Thistles



Senior club president
Chris Tangye



Helensburgh has a rich history of hard work and a deep community-wide passion for sport, with netball and rugby league certainly deserving a mention – but there's a special place in the annals of history for the 130-year-old Helensburgh Thistles football club.

Now calling for registrations ahead of its 131st season, the Thistles club is one of the oldest continuing soccer clubs in Australia.

Senior club president Chris Tangye is determined to honour and maintain that tradition.

"We're a tiny little town south of Sydney ... and we are literally one of the top few clubs in Australia, oldest clubs in Australia," Chris told the Flame.

"And when you think about the legacy of that, to have that kind of continuity for 130 years. It's kind of amazing.

"So I do think it's important for the members of the club and the players of the club to be cognisant of the history and the legacy that they're part of"

"Ambitious plans" to celebrate the Thistles' 125th anniversary had been scheduled for 2020 but Covid-related restrictions at the time scuppered those. Ultimately, the Thistles made up for lost time in 2025 with events to mark the club's 130th birthday, including a past players' day.

"It was a nice opportunity to get all the old players from the club watching the first grade side."

Chris said he wanted club members to value the club's legacy.

"I do want it to be front of mind," he said. "I think it's a selling point for the club as well.

Imagining being part of the club with the history that we have is really amazing and so I think we're very lucky. I want to make sure that we don't forget our history, we don't forget the legacy.

"And so I think it's certainly something that I'm very aware of. And I want people who play for the club to be aware of it because it's a really special thing.

FOR ALL AGES

By Marcus Craft



Above: Junior and Senior club presidents Gill Lehn and Chris Tangye cutting the 130th birthday cake last year. Photo: Thistles



“And I don’t think you’re going to have an opportunity to be part of something like this anywhere else in Australia.”

Chris knows the value of grassroots tradition, having played soccer at an amateur level here in Australia and in the UK.

“I really want people to think about that when they’re putting on that shirt, just how many players have put on that shirt before you. And it’s quite amazing to think about the depth of tradition. History, the future.”

Chris, who took over from Jason Bell as Thistles club president in 2024, arrived at the position via a rather international route: he was born in New York, lived in the UK as a child and attended school in Singapore, Indonesia, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Sydney (his British father worked in international shipping so the family moved a lot).

Chris later met now-wife Mollie (“Balmain born and bred”) at an audition for a commercial – Mollie

was “working in casting” – and they started dating about a year later when they reconnected at a party.

The couple, armed with British passports, arrived in London in June 2007 and stayed in the UK until 2015.

“We reached a point that Australians reach when they are living in the UK: we had to decide whether we were going to stay in the UK or whether we were going to move back to Australia. And we had our daughter who was born in Manchester, and my wife felt very strongly that if we didn’t move back to Australia, then we probably would never move back.”

In 2015, the young family arrived back in Australia, and Chris has since worked for Stan and now SBS Australia, where he is head of product for streaming and digital products.

No matter where he’s lived, Chris said soccer has always been a constant in his life.

The family bought a house in Helensburgh in



Helena Taylor, Helen Taylor, June Madge, Eithel Hill, Thelma Wardle, Roma Powell, Glen Hall, Flora Lucas, Penny Wardle, Mary Smith



July 2017, then moved in September – and the rest is history.

“The proximity [of Helensburgh to Sydney] is a big selling point. And the first thing I did was look at the football club. I then started to play in the summer soccer competition and that was a good entry point into basically playing for the winter teams, so I started playing for Helensburgh from the following season.

“And I do think – when I look at our friendship circles here – that it’s largely thanks to the soccer club or thanks to our kids.”

The couple’s two children – Delen (11) and Griffin (7) – have played for the Thistles, with Delen returning this year – this time in the U11s – and Griffin still a chance to play in the U8s.

Chris was elected president in late 2024, when Jason Bell, who had been in the role for about five years, vacated the seat after a very positive time in the position, which included helping to get Thistles into the Illawarra Premier League.

Part of Chris’s role now is to consolidate the club’s position in the league – the club has 10 teams playing seniors, including two women’s teams, an all-age team, and two over-35 teams, two over 45 teams, and their Premier League squad – and to manage “that kind of transition into new people coming through, new ideas”.

The Thistles plan to build on their success this season, Chris said.

“It’s largely much of the same in terms of what happens on the field: our junior clubs and our junior teams are still growing, which is fantastic.

“We have some of the best facilities in the Football South Coast area.

“One of the big things I want to try and improve is the lighting [for the oval], switch our lighting to LED lighting, which is obviously a big job. That’s one of the things I’d really like to do, which is just to make the conditions [better] for our night games.

“There’s also a little bit of light work we can do around accessibility, which we want to improve. And that’s providing accessible access from the car park to the clubhouse and shed and down to the soccer fields and stuff.

“But, ultimately, the culture that we try to promote within the club is one I want it to be – we have players from three down to 60 or 70. And we are a club which can support players who want to play and transition into the top level, but equally we want to be a club that supports a player who just wants to come and have a kick-about with their mates.

“What we try and do is provide a place that is supportive and inclusive for everybody. Your level of skill doesn’t matter. And I think we do that and I see that as part of my role.”

Registration for all Football South Coast players opened on January 5, 2026. 🌟

Two batteries, one big dilemma

By Peter Aubourg



Last week we had a house battery installed by 4EVA Energy. House batteries are very popular at the moment due to the generous federal government rebates. This is our second big battery. The first one we bought a couple of years ago. It was 51kWh and came with tyres, seats and a steering wheel. This is quite convenient, because we can drive the battery down to the shops and even take it on extended trips.

It also comes with windows and a roof and an MG4 label on the front. But this mobility can be a problem. We often drive it away during the day, so it's not plugged in to lap up excess power from our solar panels. Then we give away our solar power to the energy company at bargain basement prices.

Now, our new house battery is a stay-at-home, 24kWh battery, which is always on standby, ready to capture any electrons from our solar panels that look like they are going to sneak off to the grid.

We had the battery installed a few days before

that January heatwave. Both car battery and house battery were chockers. Then came the overcast period. After a few days, the house battery was close to empty, and the car was less than half full, AND there was not that much solar power. What to do? We could just buy power from the grid but that seemed like cheating. So, we had a dilemma.

It is like having two children but not enough food for them both. Do we feed each of them a little and have them both go hungry or choose a favourite and let the other one wither? We chose the latter. Our new house battery got all the solar available. Even with all the overcast and rainy days in the past 10 days, the house battery managed to scrape up enough solar to keep the house running without having to buy power from the grid.

It just shows how much solar you get even on overcast days. All the power for the house was produced by our fairly modest 6.6kW solar panels. That included power for hot water, cooking, refrigerator, but not much air-conditioning.

The child (sorry, car battery) left to wither has enough charge for 75km of driving at the time of writing. However, I think we may need to buy actual grid power shortly!

We are pretty much over the idealistic phase, pretending that we are living completely off-grid. I am now working on getting a better energy plan and allowing the system to run by itself without obsessive micro-management. I am sure there will be plenty to talk about by next month's magazine. ✨

Remember when?

By Local Studies Librarian Jenny McConchie

"Smoke if you wish", "Dress as you please", "Anything that goes, goes to Southline Drive In". These were some of the slogans aimed to highlight the benefits of watching a movie in your car.

Southline Drive In Theatre opened in 1957, in Fairy Meadow, north of Balgownie Road. It had an 80ft buffet, a supervised children's playground and giant 100ft screen. Sound was delivered via speakers hung from the window of each car.

On opening night, for the price of 5 shillings, patrons were treated to a screening of, *Picnic* starring William Holden and Kim Novak, as well as CinemaScope shorts and a Cinesound Newsreel.

Despite the popularity of television at the time, the Drive In operated for 26 years, closing in 1984 with a double bill of *Octopussy* and *Flying High II*. The site is now part of a light industrial estate.



In 1995, Robert Parkinson published his book, *Gauffered Velour*, about the cinema and motion picture exhibition in the Illawarra. To read it or access his research papers, pay the Local Studies team a visit. The Local Studies Collection is at Wollongong City Library, 41 Burelli Street.

Make memories at Sunset Cinema

Wollongong Botanic Garden's Fig Lawn is hosting Sunset Cinema screenings until March 28. BYO camp chairs, tickets at sunsetcinema.com.au ✨

Find the fun with local clubs

Groups from around the district share their news



Austinmer Scouts explore caves

By Scott Bradburn, Cub Scouts Troop Leader

Over 50 Austinmer Scouts and Leaders descended on Wombeyan Caves during the last weekend in November for their annual Group Camp. The group overcame gale force winds (leading to three destroyed tents), long walks and maddening (but also kind of nice) early-morning rises due to the myriad of birds chirping away from 5:30am. We explored three caves, swam in the beautiful gorge stream and hung out with kangaroos and a curious Lace Monitor. Austi Cub patrol leader, Orly Passioura, has shared memories of camp below:

- I liked breakfast, because you could really have anything.
- I definitely DIDN'T like washing up afterwards.
- The caves were cool. I liked the self-guided tour the most. So many stalactites and stalagmites!
- The gorge we went to was amazing. We got to swim there and climb the big rocks. But the water was really cold...
- There were these plants with tiny seed pods that stuck to clothing and hair. We called them stickybombs. Everyone kept picking them and throwing them at each other, making an all-out stickybomb war, which was very fun.

Austinmer has sections for ages 5+, contact Group Leader, Stephen Turner, 0409 695 575.

Helensburgh Lions take on DV fundraiser

By publicity officer Fran Peppernell

While we are preparing for our usual fun events at Easter, ANZAC Day, the Brick Fair and October's Country Fair, on a serious note, a very sad statistic in Australia is on average one woman a week is killed by her intimate male partner. To help women seeking protection, this year the Lions Clubs of the Illawarra are combining to support the Salvation Army at the Carinya Residential Care Facility, which has been upgraded to provide modern facilities for temporary housing for DV (domestic violence) victims. The only problem is that it

doesn't have a playground. This is critical, so local Lions will be raising funds to make it happen.

Look for our Sausage Sizzle outside Coles!

Support is appreciated or come to our meetings on the second Monday of the month at 6.30pm at Helensburgh Hotel.

Email info.helensburghlions@gmail.com



Thirroul Probuc Club plans busy year

By publicity officer Yvonne Bryce

Our Christmas party was celebrated with 100 members, a delicious meal and dancing at Club Thirroul. This year, our active club is continuing monthly events, including book club, trivia, golf, cycling, walking, coffee club, barefoot bowls, buzzer lunches, Sunday sippers and small group dining. Meetings are held on the 2nd Monday of each month; we focus on fun and friendship.



Discover the Shed in Darkes Forest

By publicity officer Paul Blanksby

Your Men's Shed offers so much, and now there's a nice new meeting room to settle back for a quiet cuppa, perhaps a game of cards, or the chance to become a chess master. Of course, there's woodwork, metalwork, machine repairs, craft, and more. We even have a (one-hole, par TBC) golf course. We welcome everyone over the age of 18, men and women. Helensburgh Men's Shed is at 624 Darkes Forest Rd, Darkes Forest. Mon, Tue Men; Wed Combined – 9am-3pm. Mobile: 0478 892 485 or email info@helensburghmensshed.org.au

SPAT plans bush dance in March

By Lauren Mitsak of Stanwell Park Arts Theatre
The committee met to discuss the program for our 52nd year! A bush dance night featuring our local SPAT musicians and friends will be held on one of the days of the weekend of March 20.

SPAT Singers Supper Show will be on two Saturday evenings, June 27 and July 4, with a possible afternoon soiree on Sunday, July 5. If you would like to join the Singers, we meet Fridays at 7pm under the direction of the multi-talented Lindy Sharp. Rod Lander – singer, published songwriter, and conductor who founded The SPAT Singers and directed it for 40 years – has written a musical script, yet to be named, which he will direct. This musical will contain his own original songs and will be staged on Friday and Saturday evenings, August 28, and 29, and August 4 and 5.

Dates for the Christmas panto are not set, but our own Rachel Kiddier and Christine Higgins, who wrote last year's very successful panto, have once again volunteered to do the honours.

The SPAT Film Society run by Wayne Turner will show four films this year, with an annual membership fee of \$25.

Also in 2026: Matt Dickson is interested in writing two short plays.

A period radio play replete with costumes and sound effects was very popular last year, so we would like to do another this year.

More info at www.spat.org.au



Film society a bargain at \$3 a flick

By IFS chair and curator Jeannine Baker

The Illawarra Film Society (IFS) is excited to launch its 2026 season showcasing a range of international and Australian films at Warrawong's Gala Cinema, the region's only remaining independent cinema. Established as a passion project in 2012, our non-profit is now one of Australia's largest film societies. The annual \$99 fee gets you into 32 exclusive film screenings on Sunday nights from February to November, equating to around \$3 per film.

The season kicks off on 8 February with the charming French comedy-drama *Holy Cow*. The program also features Iraqi Camera d'Or winner *The President's Cake*, absurdist Canadian comedy-drama *Universal Language*, moving Thai film *How to Make Millions Before Grandma Dies*, an incredible Ukrainian sci-fi drama *U Are the Universe*, and *Ice Maiden*, a thrilling documentary about Australian adventurer Lisa Blair.

Visit ifs.org.au 🌟

What's On

Celebrate Lunar New Year!

16 Feb Festivities at Berkeley's Nan Tien Temple include a Lunar Night Market, www.nantien.org.au

28 Feb To welcome the Year of the Horse, the Vietnamese Community in Wollongong will hold the Tet's Festival at Dapto Ribbonwood Hall.

At Helensburgh & Thirroul Libraries

Storytime (3-5 years): Thirroul Tues 10am, Helensburgh Fri 10.30am.

Toddler time (1-3 years): Thirroul Wed & Fri 10am, Helensburgh Every 2nd Monday 10.30am.

Baby Bookworms (birth – 12 months): Thirroul Thur 10am, Helensburgh Wed 10.30am

Drop-In Duplo (3-5 years): Thirroul Mon 10am
Stories in the Park (birth 0-5 years) Bulli Beach Reserve Playground 2nd Thur of month 10am

Knit, Stitch, Yarn 1st Wed 10.30am, Thirroul
JPs 1st Thurs, 10am-1pm (Thirroul)

North Illawarra Probus Club Meeting

10 Feb The club meets at Woonona Bulli RSL at 10.30am and welcomes like-minded retirees. At the

February meeting SWA Financial Planning will deliver a presentation on the recent Aged Care Reforms. Contact Shelley Tough on 0418 218 959.

Probus Club of Helensburgh & District

5 Feb Lawn Bowls, 10:30am at Wombarra Bowlo

12 Feb Meeting 10:30am at Tradies. Dave Winner of the Winner Foundation to talk about CPR.

13 Feb Golf 9am at Bexley Golf Course.

26 Feb Picnic at Stanwell Park Beach Reserve. Contact Val on 0419 129 984 or email helensburghprobus@y7mail.com

Movie night fundraiser for Tarkine rainforest

13 Feb Watch *Takayna – The Heart of Lutruwita*, 6pm, Coledale Community Hall. In support of the Bob Brown Foundation. Tickets at takayna.org

Rock Swap – Illawarra Lapidary Club

22 Feb Stuart Park, North Wollongong, 8am-2pm

Emerging Concert Artist Series 2026 Launch

5 Feb 'Sounds from Afar', Wollongong Art Gallery at 11am with harpist Chloe Corbett 🌟

Aboriginal burning of the Illawarra

Part 1 in a history by Kieran Tapsell

In 1795, Matthew Everingham, a former convict, climbed Bowen Mountain and had a view over the Cumberland Plain towards Sydney, the Hunter region to the north and the Illawarra to the south. He reported “thousands of small fires,” evidence that there were far more Aboriginal people populating the country than the colonial authorities had imagined.

In 1822, Alexander Berry went looking for land around the Shoalhaven River. He met an Aboriginal man there, named Wagin, and asked him who had cleared the patches of grassy land surrounded by cabbage tree palms and rainforest. Wagin said he only knew that they had been like that in his grandfather’s time. Berry asked Governor Macquarie for a grant of the land. Berry erected his homestead on one of them and fenced off the rest.

In 1824, Governor Macquarie offered Matthew Gibbons 1000 acres of land at Stanwell Park and Coalcliff, then known as “Little Bulli”. Gibbons did not want it because it was not commercially viable. He had earlier applied for a grant of land at Wattamolla. It had the advantage of a small harbour, but Gibbons’ description of it in his application is surprising for those familiar with the woody heathland there now. He described it as “an excellent run for a small flock of sheep” and likened it to “the feeding land of Essex”. This suggests grassy land created by Aboriginal burning.

Wattamolla had significant advantages for the Aboriginal people, permanent fresh water and safe fishing in the harbour. It also made sense for them to have grasslands nearby for hunting.

Gibbon’s application for Wattamolla was rejected, and he had to clear the land at “Little



Bulli” with convict labour. In 1828, he applied for 2000 acres for a “cattle run” at Bulgo, just north of Stanwell Park. His application was not accepted, but eight years later, in 1836, John Dwyer was granted 200 acres there to run cattle. This suggests that Bulgo had been cleared by burning, and it might also explain why Bald Hill got its name.

Where grazing land created by Aboriginal burning had not been taken over by the colonists, the vegetation soon returned to its wild natural state. Major Thomas Mitchell arrived in the colony in 1828 and explored the country, often with bullock drays. Twenty years later, he complained that it was much more difficult to travel through the countryside than before. The most probable explanation for this was that once the Aboriginal people had been displaced, the burning practices stopped, and the undergrowth thickened.

Aboriginal occupation and use of the land around Era beach have been documented. In 1832, a large parcel of it was granted to Andrew Byrne who used it to run his cattle. The first hut at Era was built by one of his Aboriginal stockmen, “Old Tom”. This would also suggest that its suitability for grazing had come about by Aboriginal burning.

Robert Westmacott, the former Aide de Camp to Governor Bourke bought up much of the land around the northern Illawarra near Coledale, and called it “The Meadows”, a name which might imply that it had also been subjected to Aboriginal burning. His watercolour entitled *Bulli from the Coal Cliffs* from the 1840s seems to confirm a patchwork of cleared land.

To be continued in March 2026 ✨

Bulli, from the Coal Cliffs.
Illawarra by Robert
Marsh Westmacott



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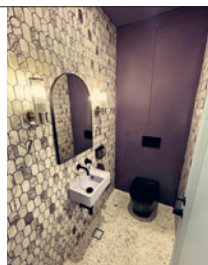
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Role of volunteers in rare stranding

By ORRCA's Jody Langlois

Organisation for the Rescue and Research of Cetaceans in Australia (ORRCA) volunteers witnessed a rare and emotional event on Wollongong's South Beach in July 2025 – the stranding of a melon-headed whale.

The incident began when, scanning the ocean, two ORRCA members flying drones noticed a lone animal swimming in an unusual pattern close to the shoreline. On closer inspection, their footage revealed a melon-headed whale (*Peponocephala electra*), a deep-water oceanic species rarely seen near shore, showing signs of disorientation. Members called the 24/7 hotline, so ORRCA volunteers were able to arrive on the sand exactly as the animal came ashore.

ORRCA's rescuers worked for hours to stabilise the animal, while awaiting assessment from the NPWS veterinarian. The team tried to refloat the whale but it was unable to remain upright or swim independently – critical signs that underlying illness or injury was severe.

The wildlife vet determined that euthanasia was the kindest and most humane option. Although heartbreaking, these decisions are made with the animal's welfare as the priority.

Melon-headed whales are often mistaken for small whales, but are a species of oceanic dolphin. They typically live far offshore in waters more than 1000 metres deep and are almost always found in large pods of 100 or more.

For one to be found alone in shallow water is extremely unusual and indicates the animal is already unwell. Without the protection of its pod, the likelihood of survival is extremely low.

ORRCA would like to acknowledge the many volunteers who responded, and members of the public who gave space and support. While not every rescue ends in a release, every response matters. Each incident contributes to national research, helping us understand how to protect these remarkable marine mammals.

ORRCA's 24/7 hotline is (02) 9415 3333 🌟

Surfers bond at First Nations celebration

By Tyneesha Williams

More than 60 grommets aged between six and 16 years hit the beach between Thirroul and Bulli for a day of competitive surfing that an Dharawal elder acclaimed as a great success.

The Kuradjji Junior Surf Competition at McCauleys Beach ran alongside the 25th anniversary celebrations of the Sandon Point Tent Embassy, beginning with a smoking ceremony and storytelling from Uncle Peter before heats began.

"We helped the kids understand the importance of the place, and how it's about bringing people together in the spirit of reconciliation and in the order of respect," the Dharawal elder said.

Sandon Point Boardriders ran the competition on December 13 at the request of Uncle Peter, welcoming everyone to enjoy music, dance, BBQ and ceremony along with the surf competition, celebrating the continued connection to and protection of Sandon Point Aboriginal Place.

Illawarra Sports High School student Taj Air won the under 16 division. Sam Kornek came first in under 14s and Noah Kornek won the under 12s. Mahalia Robson came first in under 10s and Lennox Hayes won under 8s.

For Karl Lavis, president of the Sandon Point Boardriders, supporting the Kuradjji event aligns perfectly with the club's family ethos.



"We not only try to produce good surfers – we try to produce good humans," Karl says.

"It's not all about surfing; we're all about helping people and helping different organisations in the community – there's a lot of respect and that's what we're all about."

The event was sponsored by Djiriba Waargura, Sandon Point Boardriders, Illawarra Aboriginal Medical Service, Finbox, Surfipit, DP Surfboards, Byrne Surf, Ocean and Earth and Surfboard Empire. Uncle Peter thanks the community for their support over the years. "It means a real lot. People showing respect and caring and showing how important this place is for them." ✨



Where will Santa's truck stop

By Jim Powell, retired captain of Helensburgh's 325 station,

When the now NSW Fire + Rescue 325 station first opened in August 1975 it was called Station 10 Illawarra Zone. It had a crew of 12 men under the captaincy of Dennis Foster and like most Fire Stations we all became good friends. The lolly tradition began with a firey family Christmas party.

In 1980, the first Lions Club Santa lolly run took place with Santa sitting on top of the fire engine, throwing out lollies to the children and parents

around the streets of Helensburgh. We had 1000 bags of lollies and used about 900.

In 2002 after the tragic bushfires that hit Helensburgh and its hamlets, Warwick Erwin – who instigated the Community Fire Units (CFUs) in the town – became involved and he is now the co-ordinator. Warwick plans the route and drives the Santa safety vehicle. Today you can track the whereabouts of Santa and his helpers on your mobile phone.

Our Santa Lolly run has expanded to include Stanwell Tops and Bald Hill. What was once a five-hour job now takes Santa nine hours to do, with two crews, one for the morning and another for the afternoon shift. The number of lolly bags has increased from 1000 to nearly 4000 bags.

The Lions Club still provide our lollies with financial help from our Tradies Club and supply our lunches on the day. Warwick looks at how we can improve the safety for the children and which route we will take. In 2026 we will have special designated photo stops to help save time due to the increased area population and the lolly run's popularity. To suggest any photo stops extra to the 20 we trialled in 2025, please contact Warwick Erwin (0419 413 935). ✨

Disabled surfers ride the swell anew

By Tyneesha Williams



Few understand more than Dave Winner about the cruel fate that can await in the ocean – and how that same ocean can save you.

The 73-year-old Coalcliff Surf Lifesaving Club

stalwart is a level-four quadriplegic, and for a time, his injury deprived him of a life-long passion.

“I’ve lived and surfed and swam here at Coalcliff all my life. The biggest hardship was being unable to be in the ocean and I just wanted to get back out there,” he says.

Dave survived a near-fatal surfing accident in 2021, when he was hit by an unexpected wave and fractured his neck, fell unconscious, drowned and went into cardiac arrest in the water at Coalcliff.

“Very fortunate for me, another big wave came through and washed me out of the ocean, literally lifted me up and put me at the feet of these two guys who were looking for me,” he says.

It was with great pleasure that Dave joined more than 50 participants who met for community spirit

and wave-catching joy in late November at the Disabled Surfers Association (DSA) South Coast Branch’s second event of the season at Thirroul.

Dave was revived by quick-thinking CPR trained people on the beach, and spent seven months recovering from his injury before setting up the Dave Winner Foundation, with the goal of training a million people in CPR by 2030.

“CPR saved my life, they brought me back. I’m one of the most unlucky people, yet one of the luckiest in the same breath,” he says.

Over 30 years, the DSA South Coast branch has gained a reputation for putting smiles on dials and taking people of all abilities surfing safely. The Thirroul event capped out at 50 participants (ensuring safety), with 32 people on the waiting list, and many travelling from surrounding areas to attend.

Each participant enjoyed two surfs, catching seven or eight waves each. More than 170 dedicated volunteers assisted, with a minimum ratio of six volunteers to one participant.

The DSA’s next events will be on March 1 at Gerroa and on March 14 Port Kembla Beach.

Register for events at www.disabledsurfers.org/nsw-south-coast ★

Wheelaroos come to Wollongong

By Brian Kelly

Wollongong will host every game of the Wheelchair Rugby League World Cup over 15 action-packed days later this year.

Fans of league and the emerging para-sport will be spoiled for choice as the Australian side – the Wheelaroos – battle to get past pool B rivals France, Scotland and New Zealand for a crack at the ultimate prize. All games will be at Wollongong Entertainment Centre.

Code advocate and Bulli resident Steve Hewson said the tournament presented a golden opportunity for supporters to witness the growing buzz around wheelchair rugby league.

“All the world’s top teams will be here – what a perfect chance to see Australia’s best and get along and support them,” he said.

On the other side of the draw, Ireland, the USA, England and Wales will make up pool A as the eight nations play 12 pool matches for the first nine days before the semi-final (top two teams from each pool) and then the final.

Australia open the tournament on October 31 against New Zealand, with further matches on November 3 (Scotland) and November 6 (France).

Granting all matches to Wollongong indicates acknowledgement that participation and interest is climbing in the Illawarra.

Australia’s head coach Brett Clark said: “We’ve grown enormously in maturity and skill. This group knows what it takes and the chance to play in front of family, friends and a passionate Australian crowd will drive us every step.”

All games will be broadcast on Seven and 7Plus. Tickets via the RLWC website and Ticketmaster. ★





Austinmer clubhouse reopens

By Lisa Metcalfe, president of Austinmer Surf Life Saving Club

Austinmer Surf Life Saving Club celebrated the re-opening of our clubhouse on Sunday, January 18 with Wollongong Lord Mayor Tania Brown and Maryanne Stuart, the Member for Heathcote.

The clubhouse on Austinmer beachfront won awards when it opened in 1992. Many of the original building team, including Ian Foreman, Steve Perkiss, Elaine Whiton and architect Ron Forbes, attended the reopening.

The upgrades include a new accessible bathroom, office, first aid room and storage spaces. The new design kept the original layout, retaining the heritage of the building and also reducing cost and environmental impact.

The design emphasises beautiful full height skylights and timber picture windows in the main hallway. The render on the main hallway wall has been removed to expose the original brick work. The wall contains some of the 22,000 reclaimed bricks that were salvaged from the original kiosk that served as a temporary club house from 1977 to 1991 and re-laid for the new building.

Modernising the facilities is crucial as we strive to grow, be more inclusive and celebrate diversity. Our club attracts people from Western Sydney, the Southern Highlands, Campbelltown, and other regional areas of NSW, with almost one in three participants coming from outside the Austinmer area. The upgrade has also tripled storage capacity for the club's valuable equipment.

A Surf Club Facilities Grant administered by NSW Office of Sport provided \$253,000 towards the project. Austinmer SLSC generated an additional \$90k of in-kind contributions.

Previous secretary Nigel Walsh and treasurer Ryan Sabet created this opportunity by securing the grant funding. The talented Lisa Perry, from Perry Designs brought it to life. Other industry partners were TileCloud and Reece Plumbing. Zoran Draca and his ProBuilt 4U building team have gone above and beyond.

Thanks also to the community for their patience – especially early morning swimmers who had cold showers through winter. It was worth the wait. 🌟

Playgroup's back

By principal Emma Hutchinson

Scarborough Public School is delighted to announce the return of its much-loved weekly playgroup on Friday, 6 March, 9-10:30am.

Held in the beautiful school grounds, playgroup is a relaxed space for children and carers. Everyone is welcome.

Playgroup is a wonderful opportunity to meet people, support early social and play-based learning and chat with educators about public education and school readiness. Children will be treated to a fresh fruit platter, while adults can enjoy tea and coffee – because really... where would you rather be on a Friday morning?

Email expressions of interest to scarborough-p.school@det.nsw.edu.au 🌟

AGM held

By Ian Pepper



Another big year is planned for 2026 at Scarborough Boardriders starting with the Annual General Meeting on Tuesday, 20 January. Our Committee being voted in as follows with most continuing on from 2025.

- President – Christian DeClouett
- Vice President – Fin McLaren
- Treasurer – Tristen Hargreaves
- Contest Director – Ian Pepper
- Secretary – Nick McLaren

Membership is open at liveheats.com.au/scarborough or follow the links from our Instagram and Facebook pages.

Our first event is scheduled for Sunday, 1 February and Treachery is 13-14 March. 🌟

Port Kembla Tidal Chart

February 2026

TIME	M	TIME	M	TIME	M	TIME	M
1 0159 0.43 0834 1.93 SU 1526 0.15 2121 1.30		10 0309 1.40 0959 0.71 TU 1524 1.04 2107 0.68		19 0358 0.40 1019 1.77 TH 1649 0.23 2253 1.48		28 0635 1.73 1334 0.31 SA 1934 1.23	
2 0251 0.39 0923 1.94 MO 1609 0.14 ○ 2206 1.35		11 0410 1.40 1120 0.68 WE 1652 1.01 2215 0.71		20 0444 0.39 1059 1.71 FR 1723 0.26 2334 1.54			
3 0341 0.37 1008 1.90 TU 1649 0.17 2248 1.38		12 0515 1.44 1229 0.61 TH 1813 1.03 2324 0.70		21 0532 0.40 1142 1.61 SA 1759 0.32			
4 0429 0.39 1051 1.81 WE 1727 0.23 2330 1.39		13 0615 1.50 1320 0.53 FR 1909 1.09		22 0017 1.57 0625 0.44 SU 1228 1.47 1837 0.40			
5 0515 0.44 1130 1.69 TH 1800 0.31		14 0022 0.65 0705 1.57 SA 1401 0.44 1952 1.15		23 0104 1.59 0725 0.49 MO 1321 1.32 1920 0.49			
6 0010 1.40 0600 0.50 FR 1209 1.54 1831 0.40		15 0111 0.59 0747 1.65 SU 1438 0.37 2029 1.21		24 0158 1.58 0837 0.53 TU 1427 1.18 ○ 2014 0.58			
7 0049 1.41 0648 0.58 SA 1246 1.38 1900 0.48		16 0153 0.53 0827 1.72 MO 1511 0.31 2103 1.28		25 0301 1.58 1002 0.53 WE 1552 1.09 2124 0.64			
8 0130 1.40 0741 0.65 SU 1327 1.24 1932 0.56		17 0234 0.47 0903 1.77 TU 1544 0.26 ● 2139 1.34		26 0415 1.60 1129 0.48 TH 1726 1.09 2244 0.64			
9 0215 1.40 0843 0.70 MO 1416 1.12 ○ 2013 0.63		18 0315 0.42 0941 1.79 WE 1615 0.23 2215 1.41		27 0530 1.65 1239 0.39 FR 1839 1.15 2358 0.59			

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Helensburgh Sunday Social Golf Club

By Robert 'Indy' Jones

HSSGC 2026 did not start with the Loud Shirt parade but with the desire to don a raincoat and sou'wester to find the fairways. We live to play another day and reflect on a repeat of January 2026.

Upcoming HSSGC events are on February 8 (8am Tee-off), March 8 (8:30am), and April 12 (8am). Preparations are on in earnest for the HSSGC "Match Play" series, details to be broadcast soon, with an increasing number of members vying for the title of champion.

BBQ cuisine is set for an upgrade so there is much to look forward to in the coming year.

Call Tony on 0418 863 100 for new and current 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: Good times as par as the eye can see.

Tradies Social Golf

By Barry Thompson

My future *Flame* articles will be of a gentler, kinder nature as I've adopted these New Year resolutions:

- 1) I will stop hounding our revered Presso Terry, even though he is the source of a good laugh
- 2) I will accept that Mick the merciless does not have a personal vendetta against me. All handicappers develop that trait. Hate to see what he has done to Dave Tipping over the break
- 3) I will suppress a snigger when an opponent misses a metre putt or when a big hitter slices toward the highway in full view of the gallery
- 4) I will scrutinise every grain of information from Rod to ensure its veracity, and
- 5) I will not argue with our catering crew over their choice of condiments.

Adherence to these principles will ensure that my future jottings are all sweetness and light. Mind you, I've been making resolutions for over 80 years and never managed to stick to any of them.

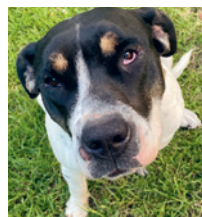
Rain forced us to call off our Jan 17 round, so Feb 14 at Boomerang (7am Tee Off) will be our first 2026 game. Mick will get Matchplay names. ✨

Thanks for bringing fireworks fun to everyone



On New Year's Eve, Wollongong Lord Mayor Tania Brown presented Helensburgh's Warwick Erwin with a certificate of recognition for his volunteer service in coordinating the accessibility viewing area at the NYE and Australia Day celebrations from 2016 to 2025. Ten years ago, Warwick was on the Bicentennial Committee and one of five volunteers looking after about 30 people. Ahead of the 2026 Australia Day fireworks at Wollongong Harbour, he was expecting to coordinate parking and wheelchair access for 10 minibuses, dozens of private cars and a total of more than 120 people, including clients from disability support provider the CRAM Foundation "We have CRAM sponsoring it and they absolutely love it – their clients in group homes that come have an absolute ball, and that's why I still do it," Warwick said. ✨

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