

The Manning Community News

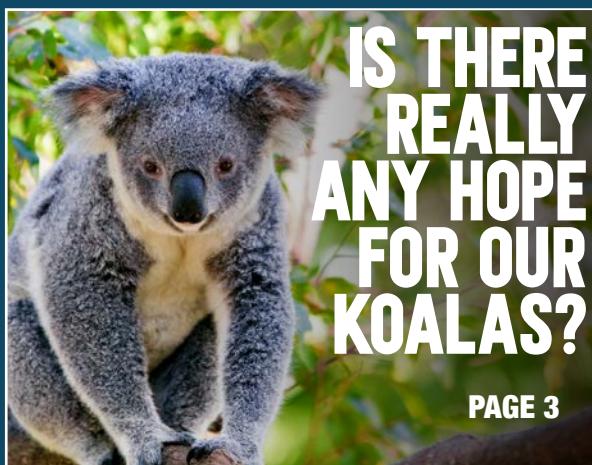
AUGUST 2023

SHARING COMMUNITY NEWS AND VIEWS

FREE

This paper is being published as a community service to provide readers with factual and independent coverage of news, people and events in our district.

If you have a story idea please contact us. PO BOX 7, WINGHAM NSW 2429 editor@manningcommunitynews.com



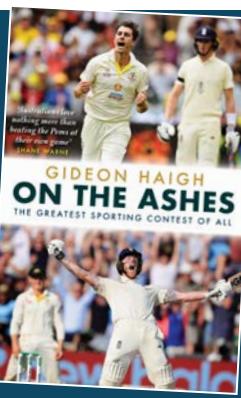
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A QUARRY IN THE BUCOLIC AND BEAUTIFUL WALLAROO STATE FOREST? WHAT THE HELL ARE THEY THINKING!

New South Wales is facing a biodiversity crisis which was significantly aggravated by the bushfires that destroyed much habitat within the mid-north coast area and the State.

Koalas are threatened with extinction. Despite this, NSW Forestry Corporation has continued to log our precious native forests at an industrial scale, even in the area designated to become the Great Koala National Park.

Just when you thought Forestry Corporation behaviour couldn't get any worse, they are now determined to create a massive quarry in the beautiful Wallaroo State Forest, to be known as The Stone Ridge Quarry – but only if the proposal meets Department of Planning approval. Large areas of bushland will be bulldozed to make way for the quarry.

The proposed quarry is at Balickera, not far from the southern end of Bucketts Way. If approved, the quarry will operate for 30 to 50 years, perhaps longer. They propose to extract 1.5 million tonnes of material every year for the life of the quarry – leaving two massive voids behind. The landscape will be changed forever. They piously tell us:

"Forestry Corporation of NSW has been managing environmental sustainability, tourism and renewable timber production in NSW's State-owned commercial native and plantation State forests for more than a century. We balance environmental conservation and community



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Residents object to a quarry in Wallaroo State Forest

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recreation with timber production and access for other primary industries such as grazing and beekeeping to ensure our forests sustainably deliver multiple benefits to the community for the long term."

How on earth you might ask, can this gravel quarry fit with this description?

The public cares about nature. 97% of Australians want to see more actions to conserve biodiversity, and 80% or higher want to see nature restored in cities and towns, even if they don't know the full extent of the biodiversity crisis we face. Our regional economies depend on the protection of the public estate – National Parks and State Forests – to sustain us in so many ways.

ALL FOR MONEY?

The Project area missed the catastrophic 2019/2020 climate fuelled fires. Forestry Corporation has reported that around 830,000 hectares of native State Forests and 62,000 hectares of State Forest timber plantations across NSW were impacted by fire in some way –

which is about half the State Forest estate. Over 2.7 million hectares of national parks (38% of the NSW national park system) burned. Despite this, the NSW Government owned Forestry Corporation will sacrifice Wallaroo State Forest in return for undisclosed royalty payments from the quarry company. And bugger the environment.

There are many reasons why this project is very bad idea. There are significant economic, environmental and social issues against it.

Economic justification for the project is shaky. No independent cost benefit analysis has been carried out that shows the proposal offers a product that the considerable number of new and emerging quarries in both the MidCoast and Port Stephens Council areas can't already provide.

The economic and environmental value of the Wallaroo State Forest has simply been ignored. It is unacceptable that threatened species habitat will be destroyed. It is generally accepted that koalas have an iconic place in our natural environment and there is strong community support



Heritage farm threatened by a quarry

to protect koala habitat. Taxpayer funded conservation programs, especially after the 2019/20 fires already amount to millions and millions of dollars.

Importantly, koala habitat supports many other species of flora and fauna which require protection if they are to survive in the wild.

The NSW Government has itself said this:

"Koalas in New South Wales face a range of threats, including habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation, climate change, disease, declining genetic diversity, vehicle strike, bushfire, and dog attack. These mounting pressures, exacerbated by the impacts of the Black Summer bushfires, and combined with historic declines, mean that without intervention, koalas could be extinct in New South Wales by 2050."

Taking urgent action, the NSW Government has set an ambitious goal to double koala numbers in New South Wales by 2050."

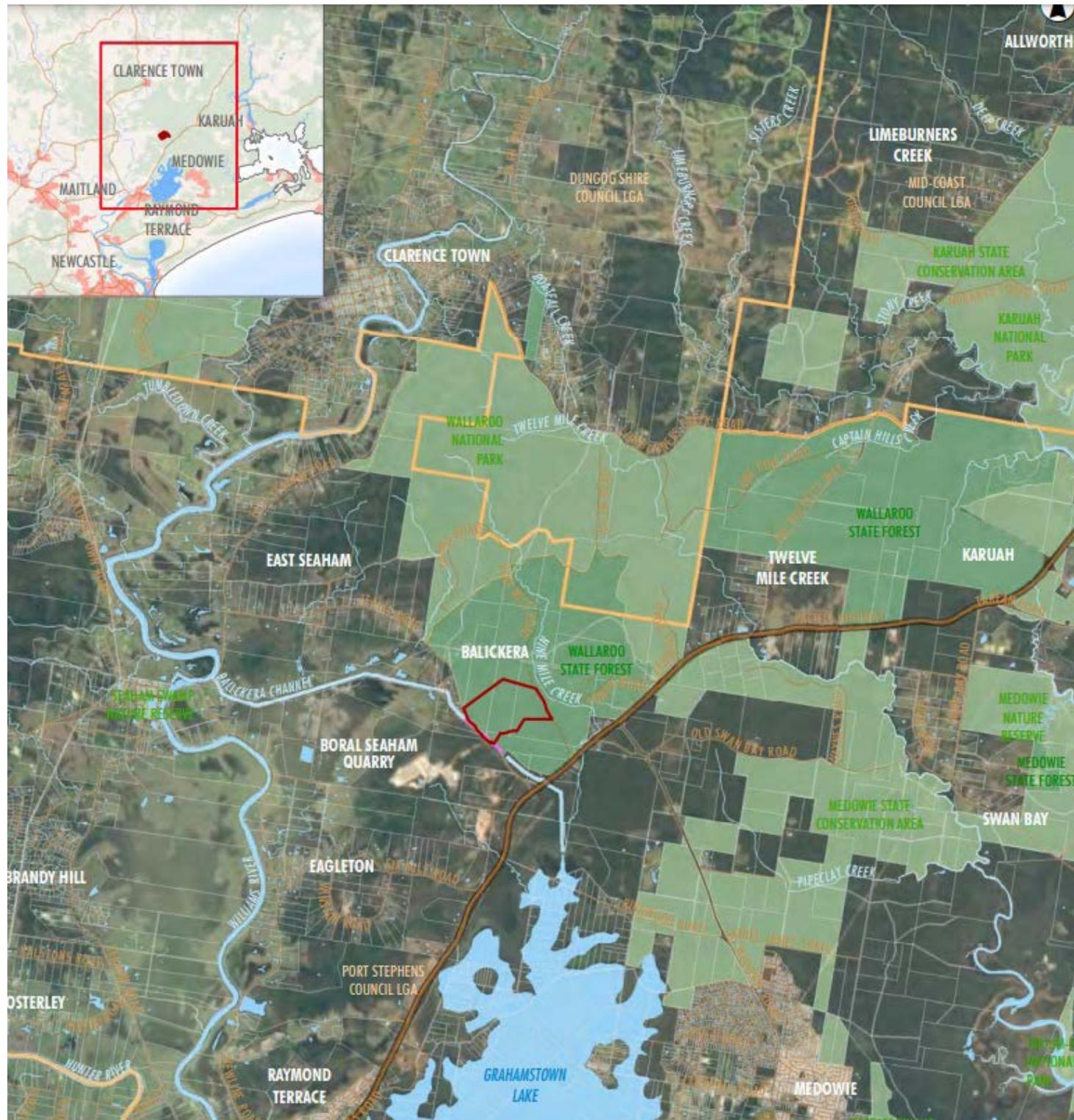
This Project will produce **all** of the above threats to local koalas and other wildlife. It is time that the NSW Government did more than just **talk** about protecting koalas and other threatened species.

Stone Ridge quarry will result in a huge number of heavy truck movements on the Pacific Highway between Balickera and Karuah. Try and get your head around thousands of huge truck movements heading north and south on an already congested road.

NATURE GONE FOREVER

Quarries are noisy, dusty and potentially polluting. Large quarries like Stone Ridge change the landscape forever. That's why strategic planning that identifies areas where quarries can operate appropriately is so important – but it hasn't happened.

There needs to be recognition that the impacts of climate change are on ongoing and that threatened species and ecological communities will require pre-emptive and flexible management frameworks to allow for appropriate action to cope with the impacts of rising temperatures and climate change. This means



Planned Stone Ridge Quarry

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that existing, functioning natural environments such as the Wallaroo State Forest should be protected for the environmental and other benefits they provide. Such environments are better able to withstand the impacts of climate change than regenerating old sites. We need the State Government to protect the natural environment that belongs to us for our kids and their kids.

This quarry will have an enormous social impact upon nearby residents.

LIFE IN THE COUNTRY GONE FOREVER

Anna Kerr's family has lived in the historic (1830) Balickera stone homestead for five generations. The homestead is just over 1k from the blasting boundary of the proposed quarry. Cattle graze peacefully on their land which is surrounded by beautiful bushland. Bushland that is a haven for wildlife. She is naturally very concerned about the effect the quarry will have. Concerns such as:

the devastating loss of natural environment, including essential wildlife corridors and threatened flora and fauna,

the loss of forestry for leisure pursuits and a change to the ambience and character of the rural setting,

the cumulative impact of the noise and vibration from the blasting on the structural integrity of their heritage listed home,

the impact on their cattle and their ability to have quiet enjoyment of their property,

the impacts of the resultant dust and fumes on air and water quality, particularly in view of the emerging evidence of silicosis cases among those living and working in proximity to quarries, and

vastly increased truck traffic on Italia Road and other roads and associated noise and safety concerns.

I asked Anna what personal impact the quarry is likely to have on herself, her family and her neighbours:

"If allowed to go ahead, the quarry will have a detrimental impact on the health and well-being of all residents and visitors to the area. My family and near neighbours will be particularly impacted as we are the closest neighbours. However, residents all along Italia Road and beyond will also suffer. People choose to live in the country for a reason - they want to escape pollution, traffic and stress. By destroying the natural environment this project will also destroy the quality of life for this rural community."

The Stone Ridge Quarry development has not yet been approved and nor should it. If the locals and forest protectors have any say in it, it won't be.

John Watts

IS THERE REALLY ANY HOPE FOR OUR KOALAS?

The 3rd National Koala Conference was held recently in Port Macquarie. It was a wrenching experience. The Conference heard of critical population declines, effects of disease and natural disasters, unmitigated threatening processes, lack of meaningful action and a complete absence of political will.

And the conference was punctuated by the distressing observation that the koalas around Gunnedah are now so parlous as to be "*functionally extinct*". This impasse term means that so few koalas capable of breeding are present, that complete collapse and loss of the population is all but inevitable. And it has only been 20-years since Gunnedah had proudly decried itself as the "*koala capital of the world*".

The Koala is a national icon, a wild treasure, and a biological marvel. Its physiological adaptations and ecology mean it can thrive on a low moisture, low nutrient eucalypt leaf diet. It is essentially and uniquely Australian. The koala should endear understanding and respect. It should empower us. And it should unite.

But it doesn't.

It is clear that koala protection policy and action is a highly and perversely politicised space. Disputes over the content of koala protection policy threatened to split the coalition when in power in NSW in 2020. It was referred to as the "*koala war*". Farmer Ian Turnbull murdered government worker Glen Turner as he investigated the clearing of some of the last koala habitat on land around Croppa Creek in north-western NSW. These types of landholders view the koala as a personal economic threat; a handbrake, and a burden to their agriculture, their land uses and their developments. It highlights the divide of selfish individualism versus the common good.

Viewed pragmatically, the victim of this perverse theatre of politics, opposition and adversarialism is the koala itself. The way things are going, we will lose them.

I will say something which some may find to be quite novel, and perhaps controversial here - something lost in all the noise. Developers can develop economically; foresters can log profitably and farmers can farm effectively and commercially whilst at the same time, koalas can be con-



served and recovered in the wild! But it depends on some compromises and moderation. And respect.

In the politically charged adversarial society we make for ourselves; there is a sense that extremism will provide the competitive advantage in the eventual achievement of our goals. For the conservationist it is that all logging of native forests must cease! For the farmer it is all trees are bad and must be cleared! Where does this get us? It is perpetually diminishing and divisive. And it is irrational and counter-productive too. Farms are far more economic with paddock trees and areas of bushland because of the shade and windbreaks they provide. Steep land costs more to maintain as pasture through expenses associated with regeneration suppression than they provide in grazing production dollar returns.

The MidCoast Council's koala program is called the Safe Spaces Program. From what I've seen it might well be the right approach. It is based on working with public land managers and private landholders to provide safe, well-managed habitat for koalas to live, breed and move. It is a science-driven approach; find out where koalas live and where the best habitats are and manage these spaces to reduce koala stress and threats. Create new koala habitat with informed biodiverse plantings. Plant new corridors across the landscape. Address threats proactively using a landscape approach. Reduce the incidence of road kills and dog attacks. Manage disease by limiting stress.

And developers can appropriately develop, farmers can farm, and

foresters can log in a sensitive, strategic and well-planned environment. And they can respect the koala and incorporate some of their needs within their land use frameworks. But developers need to use their due diligence well; avoiding conflicted spaces. They should deliver environmental outcomes in their developments and at the same time receive the economic and social license benefits of that.

Prospective farmers should purchase existing grazing land, rather than think they can renovate native bushland regrowth on unproductive land, and then enhance their returns and productivity with the quality of their pasture, stock genetics and operational efficiencies.

The elephant in the room is the vegetation and bushfire clearing laws in NSW. The biggest roadblock to the Koala Safe Spaces Program remains the clearing of habitat. The Regional Partnership will deliver significant koala investment. Re-planting a koala forest on cleared land costs up to \$8,000 per hectare in establishment and initial nurturing, on top of land acquisition cost of say \$6,000 per hectare. Acquiring and planting a new forest on 40-hectares could cost more than \$0.5M in the first two years. The planted trees would be about 50cm tall and a decade or two away from being secure, mature koala habitat. Yet, tens of hectares are cleared across the MidCoast; sometimes lawfully and sometimes unlawfully, but without prosecution or penalty.

MidCoast Council itself needs to substantially expand the areas protected by its own tree clearing rules, not fell mature trees and enforce the rules.

A collegiate approach, based on respect and balance is important. But, strategically avoiding the deforestation of key forests must be the first step in securing the conservation of Australia's wildlife icon, the koala. Incentivising deforestation appears to be a key tool.

John Watts

SEEMS NO-ONE IS SURPRISED AT MIDCOAST COUNCIL'S BAD AUDIT REPORT. . . . (THE MAYOR HAS IT IN HAND FOLKS. LET'S NOT WORRY.)

News release

For immediate release: 1.30pm
Friday 23 June 2023



Update from the Mayor's desk: response to performance audit report

Last week the NSW Auditor-General tabled a Performance Audit Report titled *Financial Management and Governance in MidCoast Council*. The audit involved a retrospective look at Council's processes between July 2019 and June 2022.

The Report details the merger challenges that Council faced and highlights some inadequacies in our procedures during this time. These findings were not a surprise to staff or Councillors. Merging four corporate and financial systems into one is a complicated exercise and has taken considerable time and resources.

As well as highlighting these procedural inadequacies, the Report also documents the continuing improvements that have been made by Council during this period to resolve these issues.

The report accurately reflects the journey we have been on since the NSW Government merger of the four previous entities into one (three Councils and the Water Authority).

The report is critical of delays in finalising a reliable Long-Term Financial Plan (LTFP). This plan depends heavily on accurate and reliable asset information. We have spent the last few years verifying and revaluing all our assets. While the former entities had asset management systems in place, they were not of sufficient quality or consistency to provide the level of confidence required for longer-term financial modelling.

I am pleased that these asset management plans are nearing

completion, and we will be considering them at our Ordinary Council meeting next week.

We will also be considering an updated Long-Term Financial Plan at the meeting. This Plan has, for some time, indicated that we face challenges in our General Fund (which covers our transport assets, open spaces, and all our community services), with predicted future deficits. This is primarily due to our reliance on grant funding and our inherited backlog for roads and other public infrastructure maintenance and renewals. Our cashflows, however, are strong.

In recognition of these future budget challenges, Councillors last year called for a Financial Sustainability Strategy. This is currently being worked on and will be reported at the end of this calendar year.

At the same time, Council is undertaking service reviews with a view to optimizing service delivery to our community, eliminating unnecessary expenditure, and identifying opportunities to generate additional non-rate revenue streams.

We welcome the Report and the additional insights it has provided and will continue to implement the recommended improvements.

A copy of the audit report and Council's response can be found at <https://www.midcoast.nsw.gov.au/Your-Council/Our-news/News-releases/Update-from-the-Mayor's-desk-response-to-performance-audit-report>

Response from Cr. Peter E pov
The findings by the NSW Audit Office do not come as a surprise to me as it was only a matter of time, as to when someone in government would take a long hard look at the operations of MidCoast Council.

Still, it is very disheartening that such a damning report which casts a dark shadow over our Council's integrity will be tabled in the NSW Parliament by the NSW Auditor General, and the findings will result in widespread and significant reputa-

tional damage to the credibility of MidCoast Council across Australia, which could result in significant and far reaching consequences.

I am embarrassed and disgusted that it has come to this, particularly as I have been speaking out about these failures and the consequences publicly in Council Meetings, Councillor workshops and during election campaign events over the past 5 years with no effect. Those responsible should not only hold their heads in shame, but frankly do the right and thing and go.

I'm not going to name who they are publicly, as from experience, this would trigger off a litany of legal threats and bullying as has happened to a former mayor who dared to speak out, to a local newspaper proprietor that dared to print an article questioning Council's financial management, at least one local TV station executive, and one of the public service unions, and which would only serve to divert and distract from the root causes that need to be urgently addressed. However, I have written to both the Auditor General and the Minister for Local Government outlining my concerns.

What is even more disappointing is that the official public response to the Report, did not include a public apology, nor any form of contrition from the appropriate persons in leadership positions.

The finding that "*MidCoast Council has not met all legislative and policy requirements for long-term financial planning*" over a number of years is not about '*learning lessons*', but flagrant violations of mandated regulations over many years.

It is also remarkable how the safeguard mechanisms all failed and that it needed the NSW Audit Office to step in! This is the first time the NSW Audit Office has undertaken a performance audit of any Council. Clearly, they have observed continuing and systemic issues whilst undertaking previous general audits of our Council. In the recent '*Local Government 2022*' Report which

analyses the results of the annual financial statement audits of all local councils, the Audit Office listed MidCoast Council as a repeat offender in section 3.4 Financial Accounting – '*High Risk Findings*', and this is a continuation of a pattern over the previous 3 years where Council has been identified as a serial offender with unfavourable references in these reports.

Council employs highly paid executives who are there to ensure that all legislative and policy requirements are met. The expenditure on the executive team is \$3.4 million. Council also spends \$5.8M on Governance, and we have an Audit Risk and Improvement Committee all costing over \$25,000 PA, which has not reported or highlighted these failures to Council.

In addition, Council's Administration has had access to resources, ranging from the Local Government Act and the Regulations to various publications issued by the Office of Local Government (OLG) on financial management and obligations; to advice from the OLG itself and Local Government NSW to sort any issues out or misunderstandings of the requirements.

The Audit Office findings do not begin to scratch the surface. MidCoast Council has very real and serious financial and structural problems, which have amplified from year to year, but continue to be ignored with no visible attempts to address those problems over the past 6 years.

This is demonstrated by the 2023/24 Budget and the Delivery and Operational Plan documents which were placed on public exhibition back in April when the Performance Audit was being completed. As an example, despite the NSW Audit Office's findings, the documents on public exhibition did not include a detailed Long Term Financial Plan (as mandated) but only a one page spreadsheet, with no assumptions to support or explain the figures.

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Over the past five years the Administration has delivered what have been described as *'business as usual budgets'* in Budget documents, and the majority of Councillors have adopted the staff's recommendations.

The Audit Office findings are not only damning but demonstrate how poor the decision making processes have been through a lack of adequate long term financial planning.

We have seen a cavalier approach to expansion and relationships with certain developers; to the sale and lease of assets; major delays in capital works, project blowouts, annual carryovers averaging \$40M per annum, all resulting in the waste of millions of dollars of public funds which could have been applied to improving service delivery, critical transport infrastructure and reducing the General Fund deficits.

The admission by Council to the NSW Audit Office that Council's General Fund, which has a Projected Budget Result of over \$239 Million for the 2022/23 year, will be in **deficit** for at least the next **10 years** is quite an indictment on financial management and consolidates my calls over several years for urgent Budget repair.

One of the main aims of the Audit was to assess whether MidCoast Council has *'effective management arrangements that support councillors and management to fulfill their financial stewardship responsibilities'*. The report not only confirms my assertions of this failure but those of several other notable persons within our community. There has been a lack of clear and adequate financial information which has severely compromised the decision making processes and impacted on public confidence.

The Report refers to 74% of *'Questions with Notice'* being on Council's finances, and, as the person who submitted most of those questions, I can confirm that whilst there may have been responses from the Administration, the critical issues identified in those questions were mostly ignored or whitewashed and the Audit Office should look at responses to my questions during Council Meetings.

The Report states: *"The Council advised that during this time MANEX meetings, and decisions made at those meetings, were informed by verbal updates from its finance department but this was not recorded in documentation from the meetings"* this is not only staggering but indicates a failure to observe the requirements of the State Records Act 1998 No. 17.

The key issues are now:

What will the elected Council now do? And, What will the NSW Government do if Council does not act?

WALKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Due to the lower rainfall this year, Gloucester Environment Group walkers have enjoyed monthly walks every month in 2023.

Barrington Tops in January was a highlight when we included the short Poleblue Swamp Loop. Being adventurous we decided on a mid-Winter's Sunday in July to go The Tops again.

A small group drove up to a sunny Poleblue Swamp picnic area. Our lunch-time stop was planned for Little Murray Campsite, about 6 kilometres away.

After about a kilometre we left the Swamp and headed south along the fire trail. We could see evidence of the clearing done by National Parks of the Scotch Broom that has severely encroached in the area. Further on, Mistake Ridge Trail on our left was signposted. But the Trail is completely lost by the weed infestation.

We had morning tea beside the Poleblue Trail. The leading walkers had disturbed about half a dozen feral horses, the family of a black stallion annoyed by our presence.

We were becoming increasingly aware just how disturbed this part of the National Park was. Either side of the Poleblue Trail, the forest, including gums and Pepperbush was thick with Scotch Broom and Blackberry. Piles of horse manure and soil dug up by feral pigs were a continuous reminder of the challenges facing the Park.

Poleblue Trail joins Barrington Trail, which is available for 4WD vehicles between October and May. We had the road to ourselves as we descended to Little Murray Campsite. More horses headed off as we sat at one of the picnic tables. The Campsite has



large areas of grassland that is level and no doubt a great place to car camp in warmer months.

After lunch, our guide took us on a loop back to the Barrington Trail. We followed Narrow Plain Trail out of the Campsite. Walking was fairly easy apart from some wet patches we stepped around.

We arrived back at Poleblue Swamp mid-afternoon. In the end the walk covered a little over 16 kilometres.

Visiting Barrington Tops National Park is a sobering lesson in the huge impact that feral plants and animals are having on this unique high-altitude environment. Various plans are in place but at best the Scotch Broom is only being contained within parts of the Park. Drastic action is needed to eliminate the feral horses and pigs.

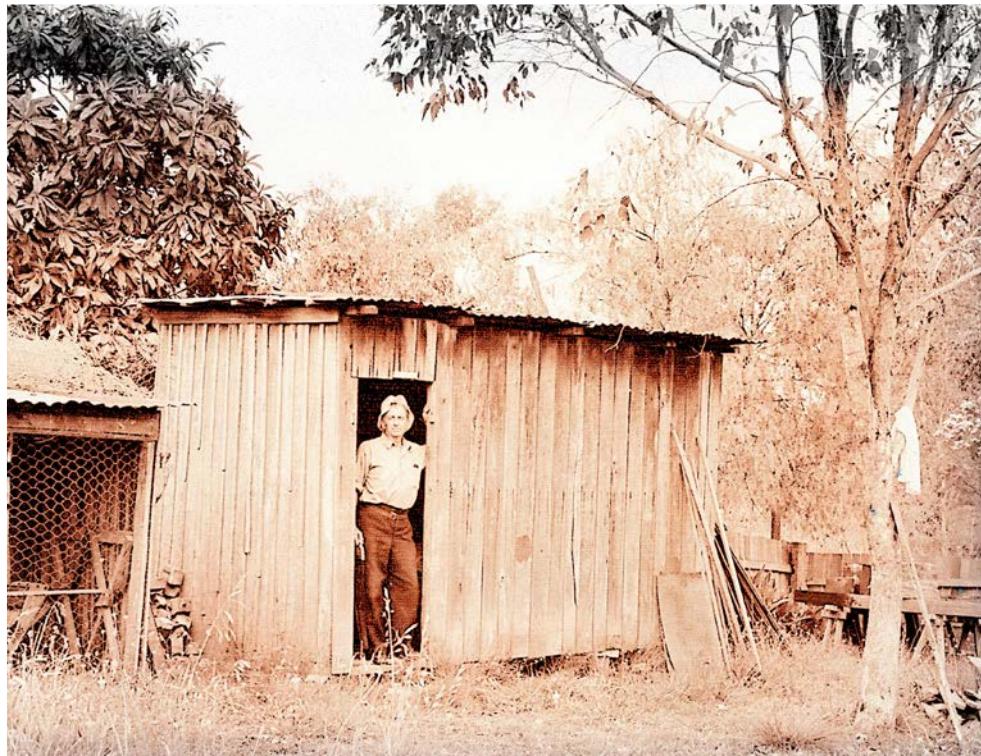
GEG encourages everybody to visit our National Parks and see the good and the bad in the reserves set aside for our enjoyment. Let the Parks Service and elected representatives know of your concerns before some things we take for granted are changed forever. You can take direct action, even volunteer for help controlling Scotch Broom and supporting organisations like the Invasive Species Council and National Parks Association.

One must wonder whether unless urgent action is taken, the world heritage listing of this area might be under threat.

Tibor Kovats
(Gloucester Environment Group)

A TREE IN EVERY YARD?

As young kid I loved a gnarled old mulberry tree in the back garden of "Cricklewood" my grandparents' home in Wingham.



Poppy's shed in a tree shaded back yard



There was also a big gum tree with a rope swing hanging from it but the mulberry tree was my favourite hangout.

It was in the big back yard where the chooks roamed next to my grandfather's beloved shed. A large jacaranda loomed over the back fence where a creek gurgled through overgrown "jungle." Loved pets were buried beneath the "jac" over the years. This wonderland of a yard was fenced off behind the "proper" garden around the house with the dunny discreetly covered by trailing flower vines.

The "street" was a short, walking distance to town over the railway bridge with only half a dozen houses, and then the wonderland of bush. This is where Poppy took my toddler mother and her brothers, and later myself, for wondrous walks through the scrub of Faraway trees to the old timber mill and back along the railway tracks.

In town The Brush was the magic land of fantastical trees, a tangled mysterious and sometimes scary place. Few ventured into the wilderness before its resuscitation and recognition of The Brush's historic and endangered importance as one of the last remnants of sub-tropical lowland rainforest. After years of restoration and regeneration by Dr John Stockard and his group, it became and remains, a significant icon for tourists to the Manning.

Koalas, birds, wallabies, wombats, turtles, echidnas, snakes and platy-

pus, all manner of our beloved Aussie creatures, thrived around Wingham.

Having returned to live here some time back, it's aching to see the loss of wildlife and the endless destruction (so much unnecessary) of mature trees.

I cringe when I see those overhead views of Sydney on the TV news – acres of touching grey roofs of leggo-like homes and nary a blade of grass or bush, let alone a surviving fully-grown tree, to be seen.

But now with fires, floods and off the chart temperatures plus the news from the scientists and specialists that this is the new norm with worse to come, something has to change!

All sensible people agree . . . while we need to have renewables and recyclables, protect water and oceans, stop mines and fossil fuels... the most immediate quickest and easiest thing to do is – **Protect and leave mature trees in place! They reduce the temperature, give oxygen and store carbon and water**

So, there are now schemes to plant more trees, plant more trees! But we haven't got 30 or 50 years plus to wait for them to grow.

Every Council is considering greening plans. But which is brave enough to bite the bullet and decree that mature trees need to be protected?

Which council will say to developers... no more scorched earth clearing where no blade of grass is left behind.

Who can stop the logging of old trees in our forests?

Homes need a back yard with a tree, at the very least. Tree lined streets are more desirable to live in as well as reducing the temperature.

(In the 1970s in Texas USA, a developer bought a forest and designed curving streets and house blocks amongst the trees, planning each house so it had trees along the streets, in the front and behind the houses. It's called the Woodlands and is now one of the most expensive suburbs to live in Houston.)

Why do we seem to be cutting down trees at every opportunity? Even though the Council has adopted a fine sounding Greening Strategy which talks about the importance of urban tree planting, no street tree planting is presently being carried out by the Council. They say they've planted 30,000 trees. Of what size and where I do not know. A grand plan. Are they monitored? Cared for?

The trees Council kindly give away for planting do not reach my knee.

The cry "trees are dangerous, their roots are going to damage buildings, branches will drop etc etc . . ." is most often codswallop. Ask a *proper* arborist. Look at tree-lined streets in older parts of Sydney and Melbourne where the front doors are a few steps from the curb, where big beautiful trees arch across the road.

Also, there are many reports that the electricity people are quick to

slam down a tree that could be in the way of a powerline. Bringing out a cherry picker to trim the tops of the branches under the lines every year has worked successfully. No longer. Too expensive a job now around the MidCoast it seems. Some owners just cave in, others stand and argue with the electricity people to save the trees, please, just trim them. My neighbour produced photographs of koalas in the trees beneath the power line which had been trimmed for years. The man simply shrugged and said, "Ah if there's a koala in it when we come, I'll come back the next day when it's gone. The tree has to be cut to the ground."

He had a chart of koala feed trees but didn't realise (or care) that koalas rest for days at a time in non-feed trees. We have them in our banksias and jacarandas for days at a time, especially mothers with babies.

And don't get me started on developer's offset land. Cutting down koala habitat and then setting aside a chunk of land somewhere else on its own to "offset" ie "replace" the demolished land, not only destroys the koala corridor (they are very specific where they travel from tree to tree) and if you check out offset land it's more often than not uninhabitable for man, beast or bird.

Often land untouched, assumed by locals to be local forest, has prob-

WHY DOES NSW GOVERNMENT GIVE WITH ONE HAND AND TAKE WITH THE OTHER?

Logging is likely to resume in Bulga State Forest according to local conservationist Sharyn O'Dell.

“These days logging happens away from the public eye. The Forestry Corporation doesn’t want anyone seeing what they are doing, so they close the forest. They’ve just closed a big area of Bulga Forest from now until January 2024.

“We’ve been out in the forest a few times now looking for Koalas. They are in there and they are breeding, because we’ve seen different size scats, and we saw a young one in a tree. We’ve also seen Greater Gliders. It’s an absolute thrill seeing a glider, and Greater Gliders are amazing. They are about the size of a cat with an enormously long tail. They can be black or white or a combo and they have the cutest pink ears. “Twenty years ago, Greater Gliders were common, since then their population has crashed. Logging is one of the many reasons for that. They need the bigger, older trees and they are disappearing from the forests. Forestry Corporation say they run a sustainable operation and that for every tree they cut they grow another... but when you cut a giant, having a seedling to replace it is not the same thing. Trees are so slow growing.

“Most of the rainforests were logged, most of the old growth was logged, much of the mature forest has been logged, and now we’re left with a mostly young forest that

doesn’t have the habitat components that so many species need. So much of our State Forests are now ecological deserts. There are so few animals there, so little plant diversity. You only have to go and have a look to see what I mean,” explained Sharyn.

Sharyn was arrested earlier in the year as part of the wave of forest protest actions that swept the region and is still waiting for her case to be heard.

“It’s pretty crazy, I just went to a Landcare meeting, where we were told there was buckets of money to help landholders like me, plant corridors of vegetation across our properties for Koalas to use. Those seedlings will take 20 years before they are much good to a Koala, and yet the same Government is knocking over hundreds of thousands of fully grown Koala feed-trees right across the region.

“It would make much more sense to use the money to save the trees that are already grown. I’ll plant trees but the drought wasn’t that long ago and there’s another hot and dry summer coming. If it’s anything like what’s happening right now in the northern hemisphere, we could be living in hell on earth, it’s not the best conditions for seedlings. And if they do grow into saplings... they’ll still be a long way off being a Koala feed-tree.

“Besides Koalas are notoriously fussy eaters. They only eat some



Greater Glider in Bulga Forest – May 2023

types of gum leaves from their favourite tree species, and don’t eat from every tree. We don’t know why they favour some trees over others. What if I plant a corridor of ‘feed’ trees and they aren’t what Koalas like to eat. “That’s why I’m joining up with others in my community to defend the standing trees. We know the log-

ging is wrong, we know the Koalas and Greater Gliders are in trouble, and it seems our governments are not going to do anything meaningful about it. As always, the people need to lead. Please join us!”

Susie Russell

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

ably been earmarked decades ago to be used for development. There’s interesting reading in some of the old planning documents.

And now we have many of these zombie DA’s being approved for massive residential areas, luxury units, hotels and business opportunities. Swamps continue to be drained for more buildings or recreational areas or simply for landfill for other construction. And then people wonder why the flooding is worse.

Most residents have no idea what’s in the works until it’s too late. Most people don’t (or find it impossible) to wade through the hundreds

of documents on Council’s website or find it too cringe-worthy watching council meetings online.

Then one day a sign goes up and anguished cries from locals ‘What’s happening here?’ and letters to me arrive just head of the bulldozers.

The word is out there that soaring temperatures around the world is the new norm. Climate change should now be factored into government and council policies. The push (or panic) to get green canopies and green space into suburbs in cities is on! Trees can reduce the temperature by 10 degrees. Cramming hundreds of thousands of people together with no shade is a looming disaster.

In rural and regional areas, we are just as affected if we keep cutting down mature trees. Along with the aesthetic attractiveness of trees, the home for creatures, birds and koalas, it’s well-known that grown trees provide better health and social outcomes.

So, please, no more chopping down big trees, less crammed housing estates, no dark roofs on side by side identikit homes.

MidCoast Council has a poor record of taking out mature, or most any tree, for vague or unnecessary reasons. Locals are still in shock at the removal of 60 plus mature trees along Wingham Road and along the approach to the Kolodong round-

about, as recent examples.

Director of Liveable Communities (and doesn’t that title seem ironic) Paul De Szell said in a reply to a recent email about destruction of trees, that “he couldn’t remember the last time they took down a mature tree.” Maybe that’s because council hires contractors. But gee, the destruction of all those beautiful old cypress trees in front of the Bight Cemetery doesn’t seem too long ago....

Climate Change is galloping towards the point of no return. If sparing a large tree is one small step for us, it will be part of a very big step for mankind!

DM

HE SAYS, SHE SAYS... WHO TO BELIEVE?

Human society faces an uncertain future. No, I am not talking about climate change, but of a blizzard of ideas, true and false, that is now choking our senses and society, everywhere we turn. Specifically, human society; the tradition of people living in communities, coming together, working together, acting to secure the society and see it prosper, largely based on trust.

The other threat, climate change, might well be a more existential threat, changing the ecological dynamics of the earth to the point where human life itself is challenged.

In 1987, in the infancy of the email age, long before the World Wide Web and social media, US author, academic and media commentator, Neil Postman, wrote:

What [George] Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What [Aldous] Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one. Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much (information) that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance.'

That 'sea of irrelevance' is rising, surfing on the waves of social media, and being lifted to new levels by 'generative pre-trained transformers' (GPT), the machines at the heart of AI, artificial intelligence.

But it doesn't have to be that way.

The information challenge is complicated by the issues that are threaded through it.

First, social media platforms want to maximise profits. That means maximising traffic and minimising money spent on checking content. But social platforms all need a social licence to operate, a set of expectation and behaviours that the community has, and define the place of that service in the community. Thus, they must be sensitive to their users' needs and expectations to prosper.

Secondly, governments of all political stripes, want to regulate society to achieve certain goals. Authoritarian government supports community interests to the extent those interests serve the ruling elite. Democratic governments, of which there are an astonishing variety, are expected to serve the interests of the people.

One of those interests in a democracy is the free flow of information, with some quality control, but not at the price of suppressing free speech, beyond that which serves some public interest like not provoking panic. It is a fine balance and regularly contested and is being contested at present with proposed Commonwealth legislation.

There are contending ideas about what amounts to truth. The last decade has seen the matter become very contested. 'Fake news' made an early appearance, shortly followed by 'alternate facts'. Both were devices to discredit news or information that ran counter to the line the speaker was pushing. Rather than trying to disprove the claims, possibly beyond the ability of the speaker, it was so much easier to claim, without proof or argument, that the statements were false.

And there is a further distinction, that of misinformation and disinformation. The first is honestly held but incorrect beliefs, passed on without malice. The second, information that is known to be false but passed on with malicious or mischievous intent.

China and Russia have both weaponised social media. Their chat bots pour out torrents of disinformation aimed at western democracies, to sow doubt about others and to destabilise their communities.

In times of crisis, communi-

ties rally to strong leaders and seek simple answers to what are complex situations. The claims and counter claims made in social media during the early days of the pandemic are good examples.

They were compiled, together with government, to suppress false claims for an article in a weekend newspaper recently. The article was alarmist about Canberra's alleged suppression of free speech but the evidence seemed to point the other way.

Simple and alarmist claims like 'Masks don't work' or 'Vaccines don't work', may not deserve suppression, but they do find listeners who want simple answers. The complex answers require receptiveness and, sometimes, self discipline.

Masks do work. They have been used for infection control in operating theatres for more than a century, but a scarf over the mouth is next to useless. And the efficacy of a vaccine depends on many things especially the health of the person's immune system. At very least, vaccines reduce the severity of a disease in a vaccinated sufferer.

Vaccines contributed to victory in the US War of Independence. George Washington insisted that members of the Continental Army be vaccinated against Small Pox, then the scourge of all armies, using techniques of (vaccine pioneer) Edward Jenner's discoveries.

Lock-downs, or quarantine as it used be called, work. Only in recent times has the Quarantine Station on Sydney's North Head been closed.

Control of a pandemic needs a suite of actions, no one alone is effective.

In this charged and contested field the Commonwealth govern-

ment is seeking to introduce new laws aimed at a more truthful social media environment.

The government says . . . *'these proposed powers will bring greater transparency to efforts by digital platforms to respond to misinformation and disinformation on their services, while balancing freedom of expression which is at the heart of democracy.'*

Under the new laws, the '*platforms will continue to be responsible for the content they host and promote to users.*' Responsibility to administer the new laws goes to the Australian Communication and Media Authority (ACMA). *'If platforms fail to act to combat misinformation and disinformation over time, the ACMA would be able to draw on its reserve powers to register enforceable industry codes with significant penalties for non-compliance.'* But the government adds hastily that the ACMA would not have a role in determining what is true or false.

Opponents have immediately tarred the move as an attack on free speech. But it is further empowering the social media platforms to take more responsibility to for content, something that costs money.

But both sides of politics can be taken down by fake news. This may be a small step to free and responsible speech . . . but it will still be a race between . . . "he says, she says . . ." Be sceptical, judge carefully, believe sparingly.

Vincent O'Donnell
Media Researcher & Analyst

TELL OUR STORIES!

Acclaimed Aussie actor Bryan Brown has made an impassioned speech to the National Press Club to protect the Australian film industry from the claws and jaws of the streaming giants.

As well as a call to arms to protect our film industry Bryan reflected on his own career.

"In 1968 I was working at the AMP Society at Circular Quay studying to be an actuary. A newsletter went round the company informing the staff that the Drama Club would be staging an end of the year review in the theatrette and welcomed any staff that wished to audition.

I hadn't any desire to act but maybe there would be some girls there from the company that I hadn't yet met.

That half hour or so audition process led me on a journey that has taken me to some 40 countries, seen me thrown into the Pearl River in Guangzhou, taken on a private tour of the White House, celebrate my 40th birthday on top of a mountain in Rwanda, hurl bottles with Tom Cruise, sing with Paul McCartney and share a bath with Sigourney Weaver. Marry one of Hollywood's rising stars, Rachel Ward. Strange but wonderful happenings.

As a young bloke growing up in the western suburbs of Sydney in the 50's and 60's I went to the movies most Saturday afternoons - saw a lot of John Wayne and Lassie and the odd Rank movie from England.

There was one Australian film released during that time. It was a film of a great Australian play 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll'.

The actors in this great Australian story were the American actors Ernest Borgnine, Shelly Winters and Anne Baxter and the English Actor John Mills.

So I left Australia in 1972 to become an actor as all I saw on our stages were Australian actors doing English and American plays in English and American accents. It seemed pretty silly doing that in Australia, so I went to England to do it first hand."

(Bryan recounted how he pushed around a lot of stage sets, and had small parts until he auditioned and joined the famed National Theatre under Peter Hall.)

"In 1974 I return to Oz to see my mother and found theatre here had changed dramatically. Australian playwrights were presenting plays about Australians. For me there was no point in returning to England, we now had a voice and it was an exciting fresh new voice for all the world to hear and I wanted to be a part of it. It was as though the shackles had come off and we were

free to explore who we were, where we'd come from and where we were going. And to do it our own way with our own people.

In 1977 I did my first film. It was a 50 minute feature funded by the Australian Film Commission. The film was called 'Love Letters from Teralba Road.' That was 45 years ago and it was the early days of the resurgence of the Australian Film Industry.

But we had a thriving film industry way back. The first Australian films were produced in 1886. Sort of home movies until in 1900 the Australian Salvation Army made what is acknowledged as the forerunner of the feature film, when they made 'Soldiers of the Cross' a multi-media religious production, with slides, 90 second films and 150 odd performers. Six years later the world's first full-length feature film was produced. . . . here in Australia. 'The Story of the Kelly Gang' produced by Charles Tait.

Significantly Australia went on to become the major source of film production in the world.

But then came the depression, the introduction of costly sound technology and the lack of interest in Australian films by the American owned distribution companies.

So we had to wait until the late 60's for a resurgence. And what a resurgence it was.

The most exciting part of it was we were telling our stories and telling them with our voice, our sensibility.

All that was needed was a visionary government to recognise it and support it.

And that's what John Gorton's government did. And a modern Australian film culture was born and the film flood gates opened.

And it has continued and is supported by both sides of politics. For that we Australians can be very grateful.

We made crime and we made comedies. And then Indigenous films with relevant themes from past and present.

I was lucky enough to play a role in the film "Sweet Country" a couple of years ago and attended the Screening at the Venice Film Festival with the producer David Jowsey and Sam Neill and the writer and the director Warwick Thornton.

You could have heard a pin drop at the end of the screening and then we faced a five minute standing ovation from a highly sophisticated audience!

Early on financing a film was pret-

ty straight forward. A combination of the Australian Film Commission investment and state investment and a distributor's advance. And rules on commercial TV to show new drama, kids shows and documentaries on those few channels we had.

Then we needed overseas sales advances and that started to bring pressure to the casting.

There was 10BA tax during the eighties. A 150% tax write off and a tax on only 50% of the return. Money flowed. But it was a flawed model. It was more about moving money around than making good films. We lost our way somewhat but we kept producing.

Now we have a Tax Offset. For Australian Film a 40% tax rebate on the budget of the film.

We nearly lost that in 2021. There was a move to reduce that to 30%. The Government announced additional support for Offshore production, American films and TV in the main, increasing their Offset to 30% bringing it in line with Australian TV. And our film industry, the Australian Film industry the industry that told Australian films was to pay for that increase in offshore production. Robbing Crocodile Dundee to pay for Forest Gump.

There's a new game on the block for our industry. Streaming. Australian audiences are loving streamers and a few billion dollars in revenue is handed over by us each year to the Streaming companies. We need some of that revenue put back into Australian stories. And I mean Australian stories. Not stories filmed in Australia with American accents.

Canada and France have legislated that revenue taken from their countries must go into local production. In France it's over 25%.

For us a 20% reinvestment obligation, complemented by strong and sound intellectual property arrangements will help secure the future of our industry and keep it vibrant.

The Streaming companies will fight hard to not legislate, they are a business, and we must fight just as hard, for our culture.

I'm sure once again we will all find an answer and so move forward.

We owe it to Australians. Indigenous, old migrants and new to keep telling our stories.

Our Australian stories."

(This is an edited extract from the speech Bryan Brown made to the National Press Club July 12, '23.)

Film Producer Sue Milliken adds, "The Australian film industry virtually changed the way the world saw Australia at a time when, if asked, most people around the world would believe Australia was Austria.

In recent times the change in viewing habits and the rise of the international streaming services has once again meant that Australian material has to struggle to get made - it is always better for the bottom line to buy cheap overseas product than to pay for making it yourself.

But the rise of the streaming services has broadened the potential for Australian filmmakers to gain access to Australian and international audiences, but as t'was ever thus, they are no more enthusiastic about commissioning local material than the free to air networks were in the 1960's and 70's, when the "TV Make It Australian" campaign was necessary to force the government to bring in quotas for Australian content. It's always better for the bottom line to buy in already made programming at cheap prices, rather than pay the greater cost of initiating your own material.

The free to air TV quotas virtually changed the way Australians see themselves, and meant that our culture was adequately represented in the visual onslaught of offshore material.

The film and TV industry has lobbied the government to bring in quotas for the streaming services and these are due to come into force in 2024. The streamers are already commissioning some material, but the industry will be on a stronger footing when there is legislation that can work for everyone."

And Kim Williams, former MD of The Australian Film Commission adds, "Fifty years ago an invigorated Australian film industry burst onto the international scene. In doing so they renewed national self confidence and aspiration equally. They won plaudits around the world - Australia was no longer seen solely as a farm or a mine! It was a place of creative adventure with fresh dynamic stories. It is to be hoped that the current writers and actors strike in Hollywood creates fresh opportunities for a whole new generation of energetic Australian creators to prove themselves for the quality of their imaginations and remind the world that Australian talent and Australian story tellers are as strong, original and compelling as ever."

TRUMP'S AUSTRALIA



Bruce Wolpe

Published by Allen & Unwin

RRP \$34.99

On the evening before it was announced that Donald Trump had defeated Hillary Clinton to become the 45th President of the United States, I received a text message from a friend who was very concerned about the prospect of a Trump victory.

I responded that I thought it was inconceivable that Americans would elect such a grotesque person to lead that nation. How wrong I was, and I was certainly not alone. The author of this brilliantly written book says that:

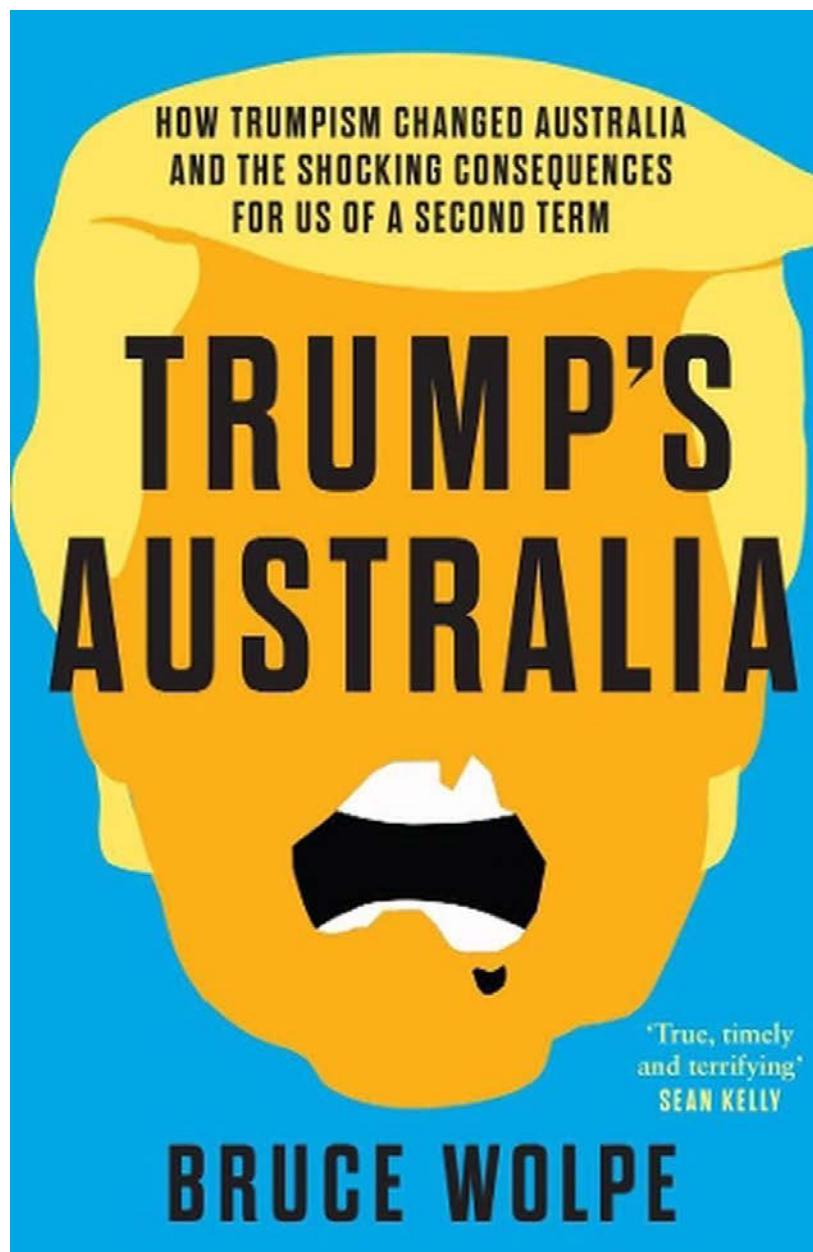
"I never really understood – I still don't – how the United States could go from Barack Obama to Donald Trump. How the country could unite and conquer the legacy of race...and yet eight years later elect a man who embodied the urge to divide America to its very core. A man who was so unsuited to be president. A man who did not understand what the presidency meant and what it was. A man who had contempt for democracy's most basic values."

Bruce Wolpe is eminently suited to write this book which looks at how Trump and Trumpism changed our country and the consequences for Australia of a second term. It's hard to think of anyone better qualified with experience of politics in both countries. The inside cover tells us:

"Bruce Wolpe is a Senior Fellow at the United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney. He worked with the Democrats in the US Congress during President Obama's first term, was chief of staff for Prime Minister Julia Gillard, and a senior executive at Fairfax Media from 1998 to 2009. Bruce is a regular contributor on US politics across media platforms in Australia."

Many people will feel the same as columnist Sean Kelly when he says: "I didn't think I wanted to read more about Donald Trump..." That was certainly how I felt, but this book is essential reading for anyone remotely interested in the future of democracy.

The narrative begins with an analysis of how the Trump transformation of the Republican party began. We are reminded that the hints were there even before Trump when Sarah Palin was chosen as



John McCain's running mate for the 2008 Presidential election. Wolpe quotes Obama:

"Through Palin, it seemed as if the dark spirits that had long been lurking on the edges of the modern Republican Party - xenophobia, anti-intellectualism, paranoid conspiracy theories, an antipathy toward Black and brown folks – were finding their way to center (sic) stage."

We are then told that Palin helped to pave the way for Donald Trump.

Wolpe doesn't attempt to sanitise the facts when early on he suggests that:

"If Trump does defeat President Biden, or whoever is the Democratic nominee, he will come to office to wreak vengeance on his enemies, especially in Congress. His administration will be filled with Trump loyalists; he will have no need to deal with well-intentioned establishment Republicans who want to curb his excesses. There will be no effective

guardrails on a second Trump presidency."

This is scary stuff, but when we recall what spewed out of Trump for the four years of his presidency and since, it is clear that there is no element of exaggeration in this, or any other of Wolpe's comments in the book.

The heart of the book is a consideration of the impact of a second Trump term on Australia and its own institutions, and asks this disturbing question:

"If Trump destroys America's democracy, does that pose an existential threat to Australia's alliance with the United States? What should Australia do to protect its future?"

The book is divided into four parts.

Part I deals with foreign policy issues, particularly as it relates to the Indo-Pacific region and China, and discusses questions such as the

future of Aukus under Trump. It is suggested that Australia needs a more independent foreign policy.

Part II examines how Trump's policies might affect Australia in relation to the economy, trade and climate. In relation to climate, the author notes that Trump's war on climate action was wide ranging and that it gave cover for our own LNP government to be a laggard on this issue.

In the trade area Wolpe talks about Trump's protectionist instincts and that a re-escalated trade war between the US and China will hurt Australia.

Part III "explores the future of democracy in Australia and the United States..." The section begins with an analysis of how "the foundations of America shook when the (US Supreme Court) struck down *Roe v Wade*." Noting the way that Trump stacked the court with conservatives.

What is particularly concerning is the fact that Trumpism is not confined to the person of Donald Trump. In chapter 12 Wolpe explains how Republicans in Texas supported the assertion that the 2020 Presidential election was tainted by fraud and suggested that:

"Homosexuality is an abnormal lifestyle choice," and that there should be opposition to all efforts to "validate transgender identity."

Environmental stewardship needs to be revoked and the Environmental Protection Agency should be abolished.

Public health restrictions are the equivalent of Jews being ghettoised and transported to death camps in Nazi Germany.

Texas retains the right to secede from the United States.

What is really frightening for the future of American democracy is that up to 70 percent of Republicans believe that Joe Biden is not president, that any election which the Democrats win is fraudulent and that the enemies of the Republicans have no right to hold power. This attitude, Wolpe points out, has led to Republican controlled State legislatures restricting voting rights, particularly for the Black community.

REVVING UP YOUR ENERGY

Our energy cannot be measured in units like blood pressure or iron levels in blood. It is more of a personal feeling. If the doctor asks, 'How do you rate your energy', how do you answer that?

A friend suggested that human energy 'comes in spoonfuls, consumed during the day'. As you get older, you don't have as many spoonfuls. It follows that you tire more as the day goes on. I can relate to this idea, as I feel motivated to write in the morning and rest in the afternoon and evening. But spoonfuls? Isn't there a better way to measure energy, something that's complicated and slippery to define?

Some people can't find the energy to get out of bed. This can be mixed up with mental health issues. In some cases, a lack of energy can be medically linked, for example, to an underactive thyroid.

It's a pity to miss a treatable condition, but for the vast majority, when the tests come back normal, the patient might be told, 'There's nothing wrong with you' or 'It's all in your head.'

In everyday life, as most of us realise, some days are better than others. But some strong-willed people seem to have boundless energy as they gallop through life. My father, a pioneering neurosurgeon was always busy, even in retirement. But in the last couple of years, before dying at age 96, he became increasingly bedbound, so I plucked up the courage and asked him how he felt.

His honest vulnerability astonished me. 'It's not the fear of death, the limited mobility or even the pain that gets me down. It's the absolute lack of energy that's the worst thing'. So it's back to square one. Human energy is real, more of an issue when lacking. What is energy, and where does it come from?

It cannot be measured scientifically, but the boundless spring of

energy is more a province of youth.

As recently as 100 years ago, life expectancy was half what it is now. Hooray for vaccines, some of which spared us from fear of TB, smallpox, tetanus, measles, polio and diphtheria, allowing more of us to experience our natural lifespan.

A new word, healthspan, addresses not just how long you live but the quality of life in those later years. Awareness of personal energy is pivotal to that sense of well-being.

'My life is measured out in coffee spoons,' wrote TS Eliot in his later years, adding that "this is how the world ends, not with a bang but a whimper." Eliot was pessimistic, but modern Westerners have access to ancient wisdom for a better healthspan. For instance, we have appropriated yoga (meaning union) from the Indian tradition and Qi-gong from old China (energy work).

Still short of 96 runs, but following my father's warning, I believe that energy work for gathering extra spoonfuls is worthwhile in later years. Is it scientific? The old masters show these methods in practical action. Cultural practices vary, but all share the same fundamentals of breathing, posture, and movement.

When a Qi-Gong master was asked what is the best practice, he replied, 'there is no good practice or bad practice, just practice or no practice'.

In the movement and music at an Aboriginal Corroboree, I felt aware of those same connecting filaments of being human. It struck me that ancient as the cultures of India and China may be, the traditional Australian culture is older than both of them added together - by a long shot.

I say Vote Yes.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

Interestingly none of the other candidates seeking Republican nomination for the 2024 election seem at all willing to criticise Trump or his extremist views.

Also very concerning is the way that Trump has characterised the mainstream media as enemies of the people.

The first three parts paint a fairly bleak picture, but in Part IV there is some light when Wolpe "turns to the key safeguards of democracy in Australia, including mandatory voting,

the Westminster system, and how some critical institutions here are insulated to a degree from political pressure."

The author explains that, unlike the US, Australia has the independent and well respected Australian Electoral Commission.

Other institutions that are likely to help Australia avoid a Trump type infection are our anti-corruption laws, a non-political High Court and an independent Reserve Bank, although there are still threats from extremism on social media platforms, the Murdoch Press media



Dr David Miller
(Retired GP)
Brunswick Heads

model and inadequate political donations disclosure laws.

The book ends with a letter from a friend of the author by the name of Norman Ornstein. The letter concludes with these important words of warning:

"...the American experience shows that any society, no matter longstanding norms, can slide towards authoritarianism and deep irreconcilable internal divisions. The combination of ruthless demagogues, a pliant or complicit mainstream press, pernicious tribal media and manipulated social media

can create conditions that lead to a slow movement in a bad direction. No society, including Australia, should be complacent."

This is a book that all Australians, particularly our politicians, should read carefully. As Sean Kelly also said:

"This is a forceful reminder that Trump is not merely amusing, or old news: He is dangerous, and whatever he does next will affect Australia. True, timely and terrifying."

Highly recommended.

John Watts

ON THE ASHES. (THE GREATEST SPORTING CONTEST OF ALL)



Gideon Haigh

Published by Allen & Unwin 2023

RRP \$34.99

I made the mistake of going to bed when the final day of the first cricket test between Australia and England was delayed by rain. What an exciting day's play I missed. Cricket.com called it a "nerve-shredding two-wicket win on the back of a redoubtable ninth-wicket stand between skipper Pat Cummins and Nathan Lyon."

To all those readers who think cricket is a boring and uninteresting game and didn't understand one word of the Cricket.com quote, please read this book.

For everyone who gets that a five-day sporting contest can be riveting and exciting, even if the game ends in a draw, then this book is one not to be missed.

The marketing blurb says this about the author:

"Gideon Haigh was born in England and lives in Australia, with a parent from each. He was eight when he attended his first Ashes Test, twenty-four when he reported his first Ashes series. Gideon has written about cricket in *The Australian*, *The Times*, *The Guardian*, the *Financial Times* and in over thirty books."

When I saw the title of this book, I anticipated that it might be a rather dry chronological history of test cricket between Australia and "the old enemy", England. But Haigh tells the story of the Ashes, mainly via the personal vignettes of many of those who have taken part in the Ashes struggles over the years.

We are told:

"In *On the Ashes*, today's pre-eminent cricket writer Gideon Haigh has captured over a century and a half of Anglo-Australian cricket, from W. G. Grace to Don Bradman, from Bodyline to Laker's Match, from Botham's Miracle at Headingley

to the phenomena of Patrick Cummins and Ben Stokes, today's Ashes captains."

The book is really a collection of pieces written by Haigh over his many years as a cricketing journalist.

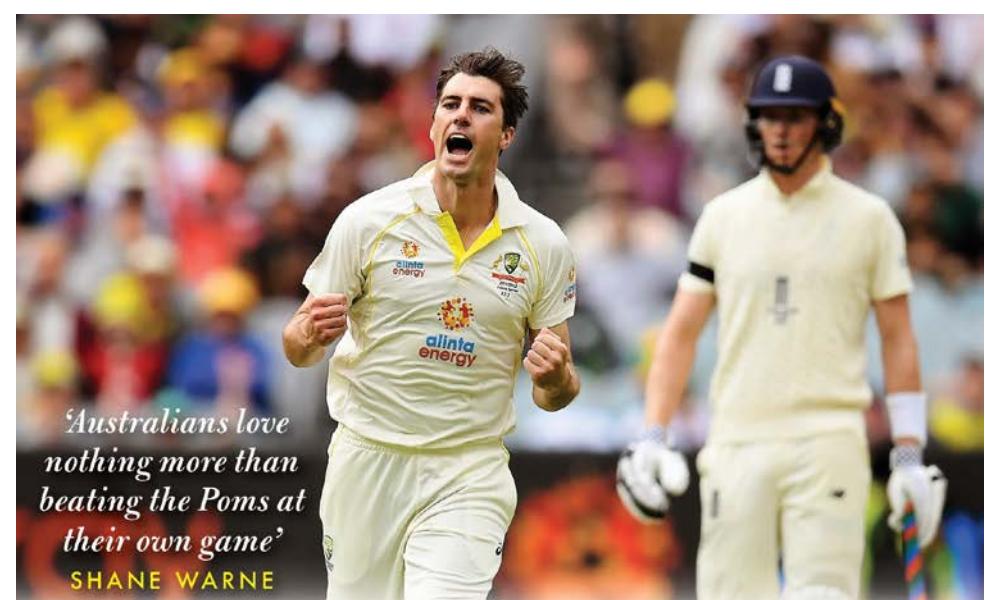
Haigh begins the narrative by telling the reader:

"The ashes fails almost every test as a modern sporting trophy. It confers no number one status, involves no massive cash prize and plods along in a slow-moving format widely considered obsolete. The small, frail urn would not catch your eye in a bric-a-brac shop, embodying the rivalry of a distant time, and riffing on a forgotten joke – about, for heaven's sake, cremation."

Those of us who have enjoyed playing cricket, even as a 'park-cricket plodder', and watched the game over a number of years will find parts of the book a bit of a trip down memory lane. I was reminded about the many delightful hours that I spent as a child listening to ABC cricket commentator Alan McGilvray on my trannie, and at the Sydney Cricket Ground watching games, some more exciting than others.

The first player to get a mention is English-born Australian player Charles Bannerman, who in March 1877, faced the first ever ball bowled in test cricket between England and Australia. He went on the pile an impressive, and match-winning, 165 runs.

We are told the tale of many well-known players, but also some lesser-known lights such as Tom Horan, Billy Midwinter, George Griffen, Bob Wyatt and Harry Trott. Their stories are mentioned for various different reasons. Trott, for example led Australia to its first win in a five-Test ashes series, but in 1899 he was admitted to the Kew Asylum, a Melbourne psychiatric hospital, and



GIDEON HAIGH ON THE ASHES

THE GREATEST SPORTING CONTEST OF ALL



later declared bankrupt. Midwinter, who played for both England and Australia, died at the young age of 39 after also being admitted to Kew and being described in *The Australasian* as a 'helpless imbecile.'

Haigh explores some of the more interesting historical aspects of the Ashes contest. One fascinating fact is that for many years the England team enforced a strict code of separation between its professional and amateur players. The amateurs were referred to as 'Gentlemen' whilst the professionals were 'Players.'

They had separate dressing rooms and walked onto the field through different gates.

This is not a bland, statistic laden history of cricket, and it is certainly not just a book for the cricket tragic. It tells of triumph and tragedy, struggles against the odds, and anyone who has a taste for human interest stories and social history will find this a fascinating read, as of course will those who love cricket.

Highly recommended.
John Watts

ELEVEN LETTERS TO YOU: A MEMOIR



Helen Elliott
Text Publishing.
RRP \$34.99

Helen Elliott is a prominent literary critic and journalist who has chosen to reflect on 11 people who made an impression on her growing up.

Eleven Letters to You is an intriguing book that's easy to read in for the form of letters to the eleven people who have clearly made a lasting mark on her.

I also found it incredible that she could remember with such accuracy feelings and reactions which she sets down so vividly with colour and honesty. Even family secrets traditionally left in the cupboard are wheeled out for all to examine and interpret.

For me, the book ends up being a delightful walk down memory lane of the 1950s and 1960s. I can't help however, recalling the Simone Beauvoir remark: "How impossible is memory? And what a constant trickster time turns out to be."

Even though Helen issues an apologia at the beginning of the book explaining she is a simply a hinge which holds her eleven people together, she is "as truthful as an imaginative person can be." We also soon learn that her subjects become less relevant as the subject for examination becomes herself.

Helen's memories begin as a three-year-old, a year after her parents moved to the outer suburb of Boronia, east of Melbourne. These blocks of land offered promise and renewal and were generous in size and almost affordable. Her father Jackie, a returned soldier, was a man in love with the words 'idyllic' and 'pastoral' and both fitted Boronia for a city boy looking to raise his two children, Helen and her brother Clive.

The nine women and two men are from the first twenty years of her life, mostly teachers, include a few whom she felt didn't like her much. Memorable is her first employer, Mr Cohen, who tells her after a year at the PMG "A girl like you doesn't belong here."

A child with a deep wish to impress adults, particularly her father

and mother, Helen did not leave home or travel anywhere outside her locale until well into her adult life, even though her friend's mother suggested she come to England for a trip when Helen was working at the Box Hill library.

"I was in despair," she writes. "A trip for her was a flight to the moon in a rocket to me. How could I ever leave my parents? Without me they would die. Without them I would die."

This cleaving to her parents, neither of whom by this stage were very old or particularly infirm is an interesting pointer as to why her letters were only written to teachers and someone she worked briefly for when she left school. Only one aunt, Frances, who she came to say goodbye to when she was leaving Australia to study overseas at age 27, is outside these early years.

"Frances' husband Harold was my father's brother and both in some indefinable way, were terrified of everything in the world, always holding their breaths in case they got breathing wrong. At times, for them, it was exhausting just to have to stay alive, on earth with people, even with those they loved," says Helen.

In many ways, intimate memories about her parents are a gift to the reader to understand the author's actions and motivations. She admits that, in those days, people like Frances and Harold who appeared to be so miserable in their marriage were like many couples. The women saw their path in life as one of endurance, patience and acceptance.

"Their way of life was dignified by the church and the church was often the only place women could find camaraderie," says Helen. "I didn't know happy marriages, but Frances' unhappiness had something extreme about it."

Helen came to believe that she shared with Frances the same impulsive, ridiculous romanticism. Was this true, she wonders, was this why people like her became disillusioned and stayed in marriages because they

Helen Elliott

A MEMOIR



Eleven Letters to You

'A quietly ecstatic work of memory—intense, witty and beautiful.' HELEN GARNER

couldn't face the shame of divorce and the poverty that might follow.

It is insights like these that I find so appealing about her memoir. Also insightful was the time her teacher, Mrs Maddocks, was so beguiled by Helen that the young girl could do no wrong. It still burns in Helen's chest that when she was teasing a girl called Glenys, she threw her overcoat over the wall of the boys' toilet in a fit of devilry.

"It was forbidden to go into the boys' toilet. Only shameful, dreadful, dirty children would go into the toilet block they were not allowed near" recalls Helen. Poor distraught Glenys reported Helen and both girls were called to the headmistress's office. Glenys and her tale

were believed, and Helen was made to recount her mischief in front of her class. Instead, she lied because she knew, as her teacher's pet, Mrs Maddocks would believe her.

As it turned out, Glenys was ignored by her class mates and disgraced doubly so as a liar. Helen even today accepts in her heart she would do the same again to remain Mrs Maddock's shining girl. Glenys was the sacrifice.

It takes a brave person to write with such truthfulness and to look back on life to reveal rare and vulnerable episodes with such style and finesse.

Sherry Stumm

THE QUEEN IS DEAD

(THE TIME HAS COME FOR A RECKONING)



Stan Grant

Fourth Estate RRP \$34.99



In recent months I have reviewed *Black Lives White Law*, *Whitefella Way* and *The Voice to Parliament Handbook*. Three books that make an important contribution to anyone wanting to better understand the brutal history of white settlement in Australia and its impact on the First Nations peoples of this continent. Each book was well researched, factually based and made their various points in a dispassionate, albeit powerful way.

When I picked up Stan Grant's

latest book, I was hoping that I would also be able to recommend it as being another important contribution to that understanding. It is certainly the opposite of a dispassionate treatise, being heavy with emotion, passion and sometimes, sweeping unsubstantiated factual assertions.

Grant is well known as a public figure who has worked as a journalist in Australia and elsewhere for many years in both radio and television. He recently resigned from his position as host of the ABC's Q&A show after receiving much unfortu-

nate racial abuse.

Grant's message is wrapped around the death in September last year of Queen Elizabeth II. The story begins with a chapter titled "My Mother's Son" which was published by the ABC ten days after the Queen's death. In this he sets the scene by introducing us to his mother, also called Elizabeth, who was the offspring of a white woman and Aboriginal man. On page one we learn that:

"She was a dirt-poor Aboriginal kid living in a tin humpy on the outskirts of Coonabarabran, in north-west NSW. Socks were a luxury. Clothes were shared among a dozen siblings."

Grant talks of the harsh life endured by his parents including the mistreatment of his father by the police.

In some ways this chapter is an executive summary of what is to come when he says of his feelings about the death of the Queen:

"I'm sure I am not alone amongst Indigenous people wrestling with swirling emotions. Among them has been anger. The choking asphyxiating anger at the suffering and injustice my people endure."

And anger, if not rage, permeates the whole narrative.

Early in the book Grant suggests that in speaking out he will cop abuse from "those who don't like Aboriginal people to speak up." He makes other similar suggestions, which might be regarded by some as a technique designed to blunt criticisms, valid or otherwise, of the book or its author.

Chapter 2 begins with the phrase: "The White Queen is dead", which is then repeated at the start of every chapter, and on many other occasions. And it is in this chapter that the reader is introduced to what Grant means by the word "White". He asks the question as follows:

"But who is White? Or, better said, who gets to be White? How can you define something that isn't real to begin with?"

Note the capital W.

He then provides an eclectic list

of individuals from history "who imagine they are White at the top..." Names such as Shakespeare, Hobbes, The Beatles, Hitler, Madonna, Freud and James Cook. It is unclear how and why the particular individuals were selected. No facts are provided to support his selection process.

Grant makes a number of unsubstantiated bold assertions with such comments as:

"After two centuries Australians fear the bush. It is where they disappear."

And:

"Australia is a place where White people vanish."

And in talking about children's Nipper competitions on the beach says:

"They turn this water into a battleground. Everything is a competition. Someone must win and someone must lose. Everything – even the beach – must be conquered. The thing is, among all this noise and order I so rarely hear laughter."

And about people walking along the beach, he suggests:

"...there are people walking heavy. Striding with purpose. I see them walking three or four abreast. They take up room. Rarely do they move aside. As I walk towards them, they continue straight ahead. This they claim as their right."

And

"Nothing can right the wrongs of this nation."

And then later he suggests that in Australia *"racism is always forgiven. There is nothing that someone can inflict on us from which they cannot be redeemed."*

As mentioned earlier, rage and anger permeate all of this book and it is widely directed. Speaking of the death of the Queen Grant says:

"I am consumed by fury. And it is personal. I am furious at the White Queen in a land far away, and I am furious at my own country. I am furious at people I call friends who are swept up in the myth of Whiteness."

This book makes many import-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15



ANTIQUES AND COLLECTABLES

Collect the past and invest in your future, with an accumulation of knowledge and great items with history to share.

Knowledge can be imparted to a learner, but if you can teach that learner to seek out their own information by generating curiosity to find out more, they will continue with their own learning process for a lifetime. It works with collecting. In your desire to learn more about your collection you often become an expert in your field.

Camp oven cooking has experienced a significant surge in popularity in recent years. More and more people are discovering the joys of this traditional cooking method and are eager to add vintage collectable camp ovens to their collections.

The appeal of owning a vintage oven offers a unique cooking experience and has a distinct advantage when it comes to seasoning. Over time, vintage camp ovens develop a well-seasoned surface that enhances the flavour and quality of the dishes prepared in them.

Whether you're an experienced camp oven cook or just starting out, the allure of vintage camp ovens is undeniable. They not only serve as functional cooking vessels but also carry a nostalgic charm that resonates with outdoor cooking enthusiasts.

It's not uncommon to come across posts for camp ovens labelled as "vintage rusty camp ovens" in online sales. However, it's important to note that in some cases, these camp ovens might simply be Chinese-made ovens that have acquired



A Camp Oven Collection

some rust over time.

The seller might not possess much information about the origin or history of the oven and may have assumed it to be vintage based solely on its rusty appearance.

Assumptions about an item's age or authenticity based solely on its rustiness can be misleading. It's always recommended to gather more information, ask the seller for details, or consult with experts or enthusiasts who can provide insights into the true vintage nature of a camp oven.

Reproductions are often easily distinguished because they:

have flat lids,

a tapered teardrop lid handle
a plain wire bail (handle)
flat horizontal ears (to attach the handle)

Often don't have legs.

Genuine vintage camp ovens have:

Domed lids
An even lid handle often with a join in the middle
Blacksmith made bails (handle)
Vertical ears (handle attachments)
and will have legs unless they have been cut off.

Australian made Foundry
Camp ovens – This is a list of known manufacturers of camp ovens that

were made right here in Australia and are highly sought after by collectors. This list does not contain the many manufacturers of camp ovens that don't contain a makers mark.

Albion Camp Oven
Metter's Camp Oven
Billman's Camp Oven
Harding's Camp Oven
Furphy Camp Oven
QR Railroads Camp oven
Carmichael Camp Ovens
RM Williams Camp Ovens
Enjoy your outdoor experiences!

You just never know what is around the corner. The enjoyment in collecting is the getting out and searching.

I love the history that comes with searching out and researching interesting objects.

I recommend collecting to everyone. Find the category or categories that suits you or take the plunge and collect a wide variety of unique and interesting treasures or limit yourself to just one area. It is always fun and something that can be done for the rest of your life.

If you have items you are not sure of, I may be able to help with information, appraisals or sales. I enjoy looking at, and hearing the stories of, old and interesting items.

Call Rex – 0427 880 546 or drop into the shop (Antiques & Old Wares at 12 Isabella St Wingham.)

I have just brought in 20+ old hardwood, long, school benches – if you know anyone who is after one for a veranda, gardenetc.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

ant points. In chapter 5 Grant talks about his grandmother's life in a small town living in "a tin humpy – a one-room makeshift house built out of discarded kerosene tins and wrought iron – with a dirt floor."

He speaks about the way that he was treated at school as "the darkest face in his all-White class..." and being asked "why are you so black?"

Such emotive stories hit a raw nerve with me as I was transported back to my early childhood in a small West Australian town where the local Aboriginal community was consigned to live in humpies on the outskirts of town and where the few Aboriginal children in our class were never invited to join our play. In my later life I have always

wondered how it was that I simply accepted this as being normal and it is something I deeply regret.

Grant examines his concept of Whiteness in a number of situations, such as the English takeover of Ireland; the treatment of Meghan Markle; Cathy Freeman's performance at the Sydney Olympics; South African apartheid and racism in sport and at the ABC.

Grant seems a bundle of conflicting emotions and torn between anger and resentment on the one hand and love and forgiveness on the other. He says:

"When I hear that she (The Queen) has died, something breaks in me. And I am surprised at its intensity. It is not shock. It is rage....I am consumed by fury."

And then:

"There is no virtue in the resentment held by the likes of Xi and Putin and Bin Laden."

And:

"To feast on resentment is shameful."

Later in the book he discusses his faith in God and his tone seems less strident when he does so. Interestingly his book is dedicated *"To Jesus Christ, my saviour,"* as well as *"To Baiame, my creator,"* and *"To Yindyamarra, the Spirit."*

I leave it to the reader to judge which of his emotions triumph in the end.

This is an uncomfortable book to read. In some ways it is like viewing a festering open wound. Some readers will no doubt be turned off by the emotionalism of the book and by some of Grant's broad assertions

mentioned above.

It cannot be suggested that our First Nations People are not entitled to feel anger. I am often surprised at their lack of anger. For some time, our community has been fed the unemotional facts of the impact of the European invasion of Australia and racism on Aboriginal people, and it may be that Grant's vociferation is just what is needed for us to be shaken from our complacency. Perhaps this is where the rubber hits the road so that we who are non-indigenous are forced to face up to the impact on particular individuals such as Grant. But it is difficult to know whether that will be achieved with all readers. Probably not.

John Watts

I'LL HAVE A THREE CHEESE PIZZA PLEASE! HOLD THE PINEAPPLE!

These are pieces from a Gray and Henderson bakers oven that came out of Nigel Della's grandfather's bakery at Mount George outside Wingham. He was an Italian migrant who settled in Mt George around the 1930's and proceeded to build the bakery sometime later. When the bakery was demolished his father managed to retrieve the oven pieces and kept them in his shed for the last 30 years.

Nigel would like to find a home for them.

He thinks the two spare doors were one to access the fire and one to clean the coals.

There is no year or date built on any of the individual pieces that he could find, but he thinks the oven would be 80 – 90 years old. Would anyone be interested in this?

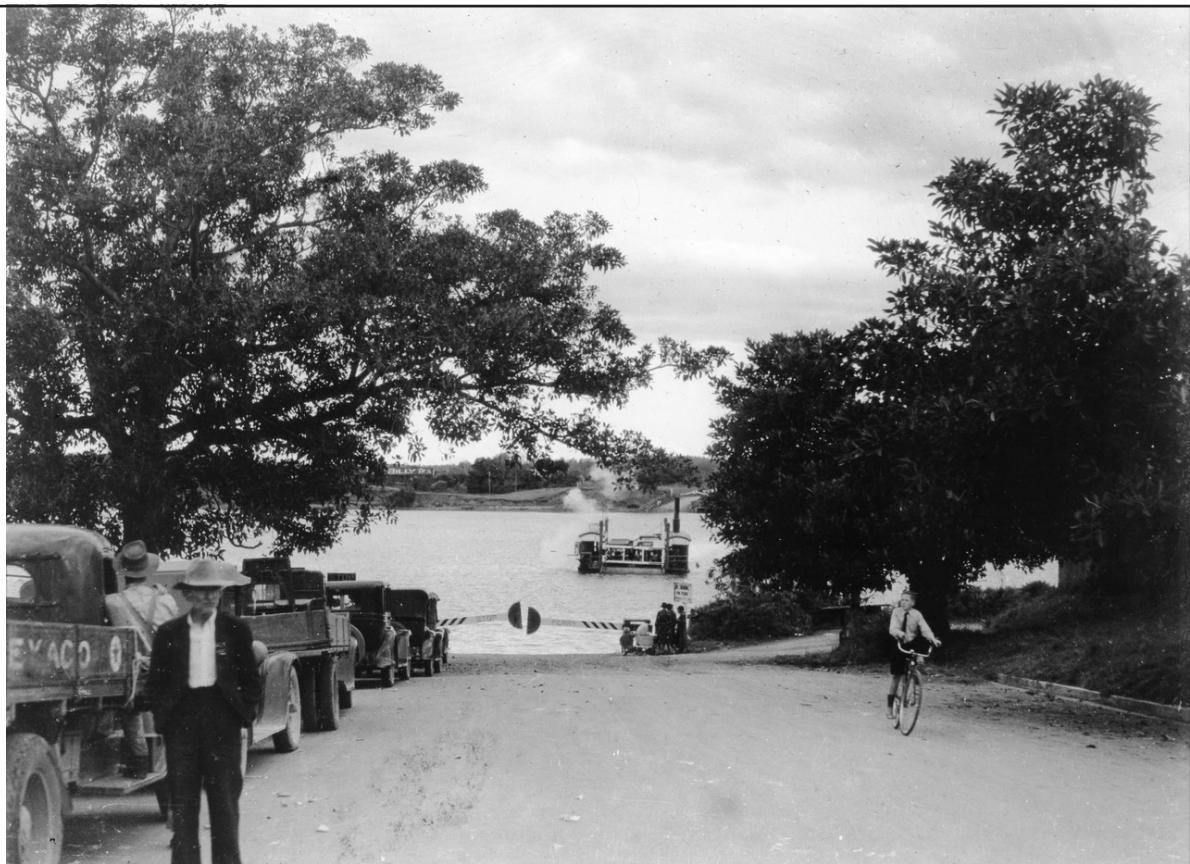
Contact Nigel ddella6@bigpond.com



This wonderful old postcard view of Gloucester dates from early last century. The striking backdrop of the Bucketts is Gloucester's most recognisable feature.

This photo, by the late Newcastle press photographer Milton Merrilees, shows the Manning River punt in the 1930s.

www.phototimetunnel.com



PLANT AND GROW NEW-SEASON FRUIT TREES!



July and August are the time of year that new-season trees and other plants begin to arrive in garden centres.



For gardeners who've never planted a fruit tree they can be a little worrying especially with issues around planting, care and maintenance - but there's no need to fret! With the right care and expert advice, these plants will flourish in your garden.

PLANTING A NEW SEASON FRUIT TREE PREPARING THE SOIL AND PLANTING HOLE

Prepare the planting area by removing weeds, stones and clods and digging a planting hole that's wider than the root system but about the same depth as the root ball. Add compost, well-rotted manure, or other soil improver to the soil, combining it well. We recommend

adding Rocky Point's Activegrow as it's a great soil conditioner and has gentle fertilisers perfect for transplanting situations. Make a mound of soil in the centre of the hole to sit the root system on. If the soil is hard to dig or poorly drained (clay based like many of our local area), apply a clay breaker like Gypsum prior, or plant into a raised bed or mound rather than digging into the ground.

CORRECT PLANTING DEPTH AND STAKING

Place a stake or spade across the top of the planting hole as a guide and sit the plant at the same level in its new site as it was before it was dug up from the ground. Look for the tell-tale signs of earth above the root system and below the graft or growing point to assess the correct

planting depth. Adjust planting depth by adding or removing soil in the hole. If using stakes to give the new plant added support, insert the stakes now.

BACK FILL AND WATER IN

Use the soil you dug out to create the planting hole to fill in around the roots. To eliminate air pockets, water and gently firm the soil with your hands or feet so the new plant is stable and upright. Create a depression in the soil around the stem to direct water to the root area. Water in and thoroughly saturate the soil. If staking, tie the trunk to the stake or stakes positioned beside the trunk using soft plant ties.

MULCH, PRUNE AND CARE

Cover the area with a layer of mulch around 5mm thick. Don't pile mulch around the trunk - this can cause rotting. If necessary, prune the newly planted tree after planting cutting back by up to a third.

ONGOING CARE FOR BARE-ROOTED PLANTS

These plants need frequent

water while establishing, so water at least twice weekly - especially once new leaves appear. Reduce watering as the plant gets established, but provide additional water if summer is hot or dry. If the plant is staked, regularly check, and adjust the ties as the plant grows to avoid damage. Fertilise according to recommendations for the particular plant.

A NOTE ON POLLINATION

In order for many fruit trees to be productive, they require cross-pollination from a compatible variety. Some examples include Apples, Kiwifruit, Plums and Pears. Give us a call or pop into Wingham Nursery where we can let you know what you'll need to be successful in your harvest. Right now, we have a great selection from Bananas, Berries, Stonefruit, Citrus, Pomegranate, Persimmon, Nut, Avocado, Dragon fruit, Mango and loads more!

Wingham Nursery & Florist
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24/7
care



Community Invitation

Tender Community Care, an enterprise of Tender Funerals Mid North Coast, has been formed to support our communities in a range of ways. Our After-care Programs are one offering supporting people to come together for connection and sharing with others who have also had a death in their life.

Often when people experience a death there can be little space in the busy-ness of life to really honour the grief journey or speak about your experience of death. This group creates space for you to honour and acknowledge your experience.

You are warmly invited to Sitting with Loss & Grief. Please feel welcome to share this invitation with any family or friends who may be interested.

Not a counselling or support group, more a coming together for connection, sharing and remembering, a space where you will learn ways to respond to big emotions around loss and grief, where you can freely speak your person's name and feel your grief is acknowledged.



WE MEET ON THE
2ND TUESDAY
EACH MONTH

9:30 - 11:00am
Roto House
Lord Street, Port Macquarie

Our next gathering is Tuesday 8 August.
See the info below for details.

Bookings are essential
trybooking.com/events/landing/1090617

VOLUNTEER WITH US!

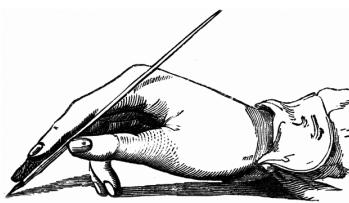
Volunteers help keep Tender's prices accessible for everyone, whilst sharing their valuable talents and skills to support our communities. If you would like to get involved as a volunteer, we'd love you to get in touch.



Ph: 02 5527 8144
w: tenderfunerals.com.au/midnorthcoast
e: midnorthcoast@tenderfunerals.com.au

Tender Community Care is an enterprise of Tender Funerals Mid North Coast





YOUR SAY

Letters may be edited for space, offensive language or defamatory reasons.

Dear Editor,
Tom Ferrier's article on Greenwashing in the MCN edition June 2023 is very important. He refers to 'shareholder activist group Australasian Centre for Corporate Responsibility (ACCR)". My wife and I support this group and Market Forces with modest donations. What they do is put up Motions to the AGMs of the companies which are trying to kill off the human race and everything else with fossil fuel emissions. The constitutions of the criminal corporations require a Motion to be signed by a certain number of shareholders.

If the number is achieved, the Motion goes on the AGM agenda and is voted on. ACCR's and MF's Motions are usually directed to Climate Change related problems. Normally they make a statement in support of their Motion, and the company prints its own and the ACCR/MF statement in the Notice of the AGM.

These motions are becoming increasingly successful, to the point where company directors are forced to take notice of the results, and alter their policies accordingly. If more people support these two groups, and vote in favour of their Motions, Global Warming may in due course be defeated. You can also vote against the

election of directors who appear to be Climate Change deniers.

If you own shares, send ACCR and MF a list of the companies in which you are invested, so that they can invite you to support their Motions targeting your companies. You can also attend the AGM to speak, ask questions, and vote. If you go looking like a respectable business person, you will have a shock impact on the meeting. If you go in a protest T-shirt and looking like a protester you may not even get in. Rest assured, the Chairman and Directors hate it when someone looking like them exposes their hypocrisy and the murderous effects of their policies and products. We know this works because we have been there, done that.

If you have no shares, buy some. Saving your children and grandchildren from extinction is a useful way to spend your time. Washing the car and going clothes shopping every week achieves nothing. If the shares pay dividends, you can give some of the money to charity or make donations to those two groups, or the EDO, which fights and wins legal battles to save the planet.

Yours faithfully,
Terry Stanton,
Tinonee, NSW

Dear Editor,
I am just starting to wonder whether it is me, or something very strange is going on for a council, supposedly in deficit for another 10 years, to have a prime property opposite Stocklands Forster apparently vacant.

Another with a riverfront view and underground parking in the middle of Taree, has been leased and is now being used as a "University" campus. Plus the an ex

visitor information centre next to the MEC is apparently waiting for a heritage listing. None of which seem to be commercially expedient.

Meanwhile business goes on as usual at the Taree Taj Mahal for council in grandiose style for the privileged few, while the rest of us are left to dodge potholes in an attempt to contact them.

Name withheld
Dyers Crossing

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Publisher and Editor DI MORRISSEY

Printed by Spotpress, Sydney

Published by The Manning Community News Pty. Ltd. Mondrook NSW

Distribution BORIS JANJIC AND FRIENDS

Online edition: www.manningcommunitynews.com

The Manning Community News is a member of the Country Press Association of NSW

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This newspaper is printed on paper approved by the Forest Stewardship Council from sustainable forests using a vegetable dye ink.