



President's report 2021

It has been an incredibly busy year for your Chamber and is being served well by an active and engaged executive team. I trust you can see this increased level of activity and that it is starting to deliver results that will reinforce Bega as the Economic driver and heartbeat of this region.

Membership

Your member support committee have been very active which has resulted in a large increase in membership. We have added twenty five new members over the last twelve months. Initiatives have included the printing of membership folders, stickers, and member certificates to display in their businesses, a monthly news update, increased activity on social media, an active website along with networking events.

Economic Development

Your Economic Development team have been working on solutions to drive careful economic development in Bega and identifying roadblocks preventing development. We have met with Council on several occasions.

We have also identified that there are several organisations and individuals in this community that have great vision, and plans, and are working towards great outcomes in all sorts of areas, and that if we bring them together than perhaps there are synergies that will provide mutual benefit. It was decided to stage a summit to have these ideas put on the table for discussion.

Mini Summit – Building a better community

On Wednesday 19th of May community leaders came together to discuss issues and projects that are set to improve our town and district. This meeting went quickly, and a follow up meeting was held on June 16th.

Over the two meetings we heard from Sapphire Community Projects; Bega Cheese; PCYC; 2pi Software; South Coast Historical Society; Bega Showground Trust; Local Dairy Farmer Norm Pearce and discussed written submissions from members of the public on a range of other issues.

The group conducted a SWOT analysis which drew out a number of issues.

Each of the invited guests were given time to present their vision and plans, which was followed by questions and discussion.

Since this meeting, a number of other organisations have been invited to also contribute to the discussion.

The Chamber has engaged Ben Smith from NGH Consulting to work with the Economic Development Committee to draw out key areas and put them together into a comprehensive planning document that can be used with all levels of Government to set the direction for this community long into the future. We will continue to keep you updated as this progresses.

Industrial Land

One area that has previously been identified; and highlighted at our summits is the strong belief that Bega's development is being stifled by the lack of available Industrial land. There have been a number of potential sites identified and the Chamber will continue to pursue opportunities that might exist.

Events

Despite the obvious difficulties presented by Covid 19 the events committee have still been very active.

We held a Christmas party for members on Friday the 4th of December at the Grand Hotel. This was a family event including a Barbie and of course a visit from Santa.

Also, in December we staged our Christmas promotion, “Bega, come in to win” on Thursday December 10th.

We again had some great prizes.

First Prize was a camping pack valued at over \$2000

Second Prize: Chiq 4K Android LED LCD Television.

Third Prize: \$250 in Bega Bucks.

Despite the cold day we had a great evening with entertainment from the Bega District Brass Band, Matt Preo, Dave Crowden and his Guitarama, Felicity Dowd along with Candy McVeity and some students from Bega Valley Public School. Of course, we also had a visit from Santa who arrived on the back of a very loud VRA truck.

This year we are planning an even bigger event with first prize being \$10,000 in Bega Bucks and will be drawn on December 17th at a late-night shopping family event. The major change to this year’s promotion will be entry via a QR code rather than relying on retailers to give out tickets.

Other events held over the last year have included:

A networking event on Wednesday the 17th of March, at the Commercial Hotel.

Our Guest speakers were Dini Redwin from Service NSW.

We also spoke with Bega Valley Shire Council Economic Development manager Alex Cunningham who has recently started in his role at Council.

In May we also had a Networking night at Southern Home Furniture One, where we welcomed our newest members. We also heard from Jess at Service NSW who are offering \$1500 rebates to all businesses.

Also, in May we encouraged everyone to stay open for late night shopping in the lead up to Mother’s Day. This initiative was commenced by Jess from the “The Hub” and really gathered momentum and the Chamber enthusiastically supported it as well. Most of our retailers were open late and as a bonus the Bega Valley Regional Gallery also stay open to view their latest exhibition.

Successful Grant – Green Shoots

The Chamber was successful in receiving a small grant to assist in building resilience in the community on the back of the bushfires.

The communities of Cobargo, Quaama, Bemboka, Candelo, and Tathra came together to create some fantastic banners as part of the green shoots program.

On Friday the 9th of April, the banners and their creators came together to display them in Sapphire Market Place. It was terrific to hear their journey of working together to come up with what their banners would look like and then getting the paint out and creating them. In the end it was too hard for the judges to pick a winner so the prize money was split evenly and will be spent back in their communities.

Customer service and Business Awards

The biggest event on the calendar this year will be the return of the customer service awards after being cancelled last year due to Covid 19.

The theme for this year's event is the 1940's. This decade was a time of great struggle with World War 2 followed by depression; however, by the end of the decade it brought hope and optimism for the future. There are great similarities to what we are going through with Covid 19. We will be staging the awards in the Showground Pavilion on October 9th and is set to be a night of Glitz and Glamour.

Other involvement

Over several years, the Tathra Business community have joined forces to provide funding for the extension of Surf Life Saving Services throughout February.

The Bega Chamber of Commerce has also continued to provide financial support for this initiative.

Circular Economy

Barry Irvin, Executive Director of Bega Cheese is the driving force behind a new way of thinking for doing business and living as a community. The Chamber have been invited to the table and are keen to be involved in this initiative. A circular economy is a systemic approach to economic development designed to benefit businesses, society, and the environment. In contrast to the 'take-make-waste' linear model.

Shared working space

The Chamber is exploring the feasibility of creating a shared working space in Bega. In this new world there are increasing numbers of people working from home but who still need an office for occasional use. If we can garner enough interest, we will move ahead with this project.

Finally, I would like to thank all of our executive committee for their enthusiastic commitment to the Chamber of Commerce.

I would like to particularly highlight the efforts of Emma Keft as our Communications Manager who produces the newsletter and keeps our social media up to date and to Tim Whitaker who has kept us on track as the Treasurer and maintains our website and was the key driver of our Green Shoots initiative.

We trust that as members you can see real value in your membership, and we thank you for your continued support.

John Watkin
President
Bega Chamber of Commerce and Industry