



President's report 2022

Quite often we get asked, what does a Chamber of Commerce do, and very rarely, I get asked what Bega Chamber is doing, perhaps with a little synoecism.

One look through this report though should demonstrate that your Chamber is continuing to be highly active and a strong advocate for the Bega community.

Generally, Chamber of Commerce's are charged with looking after and providing support just to the business community, however the Bega Chamber gets called on for so much more.

The executive team of your Chamber are all passionate about Bega. They see the critical role that Bega plays as the economic heartbeat of this region and the need for Bega to be supported by all levels of Government. They also recognise and support the other community organisations that are doing great work in the area and appreciate the vital role they play in community. From social enterprises to sporting groups, from the arts to social clubs.

If our wider community is strong, active, and robust then our business community will be as well.

Economic Development

As we have previously reported, around this time last year we were finalising our Economic Development document which followed consultation with many organisations in the Bega area.

This document is now available which we have called the "Trig Report."

This Trig report pinpoints where we are as a town and highlights areas that we need to focus on to move forward over the next 10-20 years.

We have identified that the former Bega Hospital site (McKee Drive Precinct) has enormous potential to become a community precinct and could satisfy the needs of several local organisations wanting to expand, as well as provide additional housing in the township. There is currently a grant open from Regional NSW for funds to develop a business case for major projects and the Chamber is midway through the application.

Our next step is to create focus groups to actively develop ideas, and address the issues raised in the Trig report and are calling on members of the community to get involved.

These key areas are Health and Wellbeing; Industrial and Commercial Land; Transport; Placemaking/Beautification/Tourism; Education; and Housing.

If you have an interest or expertise in any of these areas, we would love to hear from you. These focus groups are about delivering change and making a real difference. Like the McKee Drive Precinct, we will identify projects, explore their feasibility, and investigate funding options and prepare a business case to present to Governments and potential grants.

Events

Our largest retail promotion of the year is at Christmas and this year we closed Carp Street on December 17th for late night shopping and to give away the first prize of \$10000 in Bega bucks. This promotion went very well with hundreds of entries coming in through our QR code entry form. Around 1500 people came out to enjoy the festivities and shopping in the hope to win a major prize.

Customer Service Awards

Our largest event of the year was our Customer Service awards held in February.

Almost four hundred guests packed into the beautifully decorated showground pavilion for a night of Glitz and Glamour. The event was catered for by award winning chef Kelly Eastwood and a great night was had by all. Many comments suggested it felt more like the Academy Awards.

While this is a fantastic event it takes an enormous amount of work and so we will probably only stage it every second year. A huge thank you must go to Kirsty Towill, Emma Keft and Steve Millott who pulled the event together as our events committee and also to Amanda Watkin who was paid a small amount to manage the event.

This event also comes at a huge cost with ticket sales only covering about half of the cost.

So, if you know someone who would like to be a major sponsor, we would love to hear from them.

Apart from these two major events we have also held regular networking events in October, March and May highlighting a number of business support initiatives.

Membership

Membership continued to grow throughout 2021/22 and we now have well over one hundred members with a wide cross section of Industry groups represented.

Chamber Award

Business NSW stage a business awards each year with a number of categories and the Bega Chamber was immensely proud to be one of three finalists for the best Chamber in Southeast NSW. This is a testament to the hard work of the executive team to be named as a finalist, with the eventual winner being Goulburn Chamber of Commerce with Cooma also being announced as a finalist.

Collaborating with the Community

Over the last year the Chamber has been asked for and provided letters of support to:

Bega Museum for renovations and extensions, BVSC for two business support roles, Corporate 2 community for a business support program, CWA for renovations, Fling for a new program, BVSC for Australian Community Program, BVBF for a leadership program, SCPA for a vision project, Tulgeen for Riverside Nursery Development, and the Tathra-Bega Safe ride.

Apart from letters of support we have also had approaches from and discussions with the Littleton Sister City committee about the next visit later this year. Tulgeen around their changes and also how they can work with business; a small group trying to bring a L Etape cycling event to the area. PCYC, Mumbulla Foundation, Sapphire Coast Turf Club, Hugh Pity about the Glebe wetlands, NBN co, South Coast History Society and many others.

Working with Council

Over the last twelve months we have enjoyed good open communication with BVSC and have had meetings with The CEO Anthony McMahon, Economic Development manager Alex Cunningham, Director of Community Services Alice Howe and the Mayor Russell Fitzpatrick over a range of issues.

Bega Valley Business Forum

The Bega Chamber continues active involvement in the Business Forum, which is the combined Chambers of Cobargo, Bega, Tathra, Merimbula, Pambula and Eden.

Thanks to a significant grant from Resilience NSW – BCRRF and also a smaller grant from FRRR the forum has been able to cover the costs of running summits in each of the towns with plans to have a shire wide summit in the near future. The forum has also just launched a new website designed to share information and support services throughout the Bega Valley. Further funding is available, and we are currently working through how best we can use these funds within the parameters of the grant.

The coming year

Around the end of August (date to be confirmed) we will have a networking event with our special guest former Chief Minister of the Australian Capital Territory Kate Carnell AO.

Kate was all set to come in March but due to a severe weather event we had to postpone at last minute. Following Kate's time in Politics she was appointed the inaugural Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman in 2016 and in 2019 was recognised by the Australian Financial Review as one hundred women of influence in the public policy category.

In November we will celebrate small business month with plans to run several business support workshops.

The Christmas Promotion will be held this year on December 22nd with the emphasis being on Ayers walkway and Littleton Gardens instead of closing the main street. Details for this event are yet to be confirmed.

Executive Committee

Your executive team meet monthly to discuss a wide range of issues. Steve Millott has decided not to seek re-election as he has retired.

We have a number of members who are tonight seeking election to the executive team which will further enhance the strength and depth of experience on the team.

In closing I would like to express my great appreciation for the executive committee.

Despite being busy with their own occupations they continue to put effort into the Chamber of Commerce for the greater good of this community. Bega is a better place to live, work and do business because of their enthusiasm and efforts.

John Watkin

President

Bega Chamber of Commerce and Industry