



## Presidents Report - 2023

It is a real honour to be able to present the Annual report of the activities of your Chamber of Commerce through 2022-2023.

The Bega Chamber continues to grow in relevance, and impact on our community and this has only been possible due to the continued efforts of many; and for that reason, I would like to thank them at the start of this report instead of at the end.

We have had fourteen on our executive team and each of them have provided their expertise and experience for the benefit of all our members. Apart from our regular monthly meetings they all have a role to play in various teams that report back to the executive. So, to the exec team we say thank you.

I would like to particularly thank Emma Keft who acts as our communications manager and does a great job with the monthly newsletter, Facebook and all sorts of communications. Emma also takes the minutes of our meetings each month and serves a critical role on the Events committee.

Also, Kirsty Towill who is a key driver of the events committee and also our membership team. Kirsty is always focused on delivering support for our members and provide value and she is very good at keeping everyone motivated.

I would also like to highlight the efforts of John Stylianou on our Economic Development team. He has been a driver behind the McKee Drive Precinct and provides great leadership and practical advice.

I would also like to thank Steve Bartlett who does the largely thankless job of looking after the finances as Treasurer and also our reporting to fair trading.

### Gold members

We also really appreciate the support of our Gold Members: Bega Group, Betta Home Living, Specsavers, Bega Village Marketplace, Telstra, Club Bega, Tyrepower and Mitre 10

This time last year we were talking about a couple of major projects that we were hoping to develop and now we are right in the thick of it. These projects along with our regular activities has made for a very busy year.

### The years Activities

**July-** We held our annual meeting and welcomed our new executive team. With fourteen members from almost all industry sectors it made for a very informed and effective organisation to provide support for our members.

**October** – We purchased American and Australian flags to display in our shops and encouraged our retailers to decorate their shops to Welcome the Sister City Delegation from Littleton Colorado. The best display winning a \$500 add package on East Coast Radio.

**November-** The events team organised a networking event at the University of Wollongong. Our guest speaker was Penelope Butt who is the new Student Employability Coordinator who gave us a summary of her role at the University.

We were also treated to a short tour of the facilities. Huge thank you to Samantha Avitaia for the invitation and for providing drinks and nibbles. The University of Wollongong is a terrific asset to Bega and the area, and we trust it continues to thrive into the future.

**November** - Was also small business month, and thanks to a grant from the NSW Government we staged a “Build your Business” Expo at the Bega Commemorative Civic Centre. The Bega Valley has



3000 registered businesses and there is a lot of support for them provided by both Government and Non-Government organisations. We gathered together eighteen separate organisations to come and talk to business people about what they offer. This was a great afternoon and evening of networking together and was very successful for those that attended.

**December** - Chamber finished the year on a high with our Christmas Carnival in Littleton Gardens on December 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Unlike other years we did not give away a major prize but instead put our efforts into more entertainment, especially for the younger kids. For those that didn't make it, we had two jumping Castles, Face Painting, craft painting, and some old-fashioned games of egg and spoon and three-legged races.

One of the highlights was having a real live pig and a guessing competition to guess its weight. Turns out it weighed almost 300 kg.

Vinnies ran the sausage sizzle and the VRA conducted demonstrations. We also ran a chocolate wheel using prizes kindly gifted by our retailers; with all the funds, just over \$1000 going to the VRA. We also had a surprise visit from Bluey and Bingo which were a crowd favourite. Of course, Santa arrived with great fanfare on the back of the Fire Brigade truck sharing loads of lollies with hundreds of kids excited to see him.

Entertainment on our stage was fantastic starting with two wonderful young student performers in Sam Quast and Matilda Daks. The Bega District Band then entertained with some of our favourite Christmas Carols. Matt Preo then gave a quick performance with his usual professionalism highlighting his great talent. Following Matt the Bega Public School Students put on a wonderful performance competently lead by Candy McVeity.

Felicity Dowd then took to the stage and kept the entertainment going with her usual awesome talent, singing a number of original songs.

Overall, it was a great night with well over 1000 people in attendance, and gave the Chamber, on behalf of all our business members a chance to say thank you for supporting local businesses throughout the year.

**January** - The Bega Cup race weekend is a two-day event held at the Sapphire Coast Turf Club and is their biggest event of the year. The Chamber recognises that this event attracts hundreds of visitors to the area who inject thousands of dollars into the local economy. This year the Chamber came on board as a race day sponsor and treated our members to a great day out on the track. It was a nice relaxing afternoon catching up with everyone who came along.

**March** - We celebrated International Women's Day on the 8<sup>th</sup> with a lunch at the Peanut Eatery. Around fifty women gathered to enjoy lunch and to hear from our guest speaker June Tarlington of Cobargo. June had everyone fascinated by her life story of growing up in a remote rural environment before marrying and moving to Cobargo.

**April** - For the School Holidays the Chamber events team organised a Holiday History Challenge for kids and families to get involved with, going around town and learning a little bit of history.

Twenty-two businesses had a photo and information about their site and its history.

The final answer was at the Bega Cheese Heritage Centre where they could exchange their filled-out answer sheet for a free ice cream.

We would like to thank Peter Lacey from South Coast History for pulling together the information and photos.

**May** - 4<sup>th</sup> we held a full members meeting. The meeting was held at the Commemorative Civic centre with drinks and nibbles followed by the meeting at 6:00pm. We were able to pass on information about a number of important projects the Chamber is involved with and answer questions.

Mayor of Bega Valley Shire Council, Mr Russell Fitzpatrick also attended the meeting and explained the proposed rate increases and how it would impact your total rates.



A number of other issues were discussed with the mayor including housing, Councils struggle with being short staffed, parking and parking fines.

**June** - The first Bega Valley Business Awards were run and won and what a fantastic night it was. Fifty-four finalists across eighteen categories gathered in formal attire at Club Sapphire on June 17<sup>th</sup> to celebrate and pay tribute to the cream of the crop in business across the Bega Valley. Most businesses strive to give great customer service in their field, whether that's retail, service providers, professionals or a range of other businesses but few get public acknowledgment for the hard work they put in everyday; so, this was our chance to say well done.

Congratulations to the Bega Businesses who won in their category including Green Queen, Coast Hire, Tulgeen, Darcie Nicol Floral Design, Support services 2 you, Daisy Hill Photography, Thomas Marshman – Big W Bega, East Coast Radio, Shayd Measures – Commonwealth Bank.

**June** – Also this month we held a networking event that was hosted on June 20<sup>th</sup> by the Commonwealth Bank in Bega with the theme of Cyber security. Cyber security is a very hot topic with many of us knowing someone who has suffered at the hands of these criminals. The meeting commenced with some yummy eats and drinks followed a very interesting discussion, including Branch Manager Hannah Rossi, Jason Edmunds from the Bega Police as well as a number of IT experts who outlined some local stories where people and businesses have been fleeced by all sorts of online activity and more importantly what we can do to avoid being a victim of this type of crime.

### **Welcome Bega Valley**

For almost two years, the Chamber has been contributing to the Department of Regional NSW's efforts to develop a program to attract and retain new Essential workers to regional areas.

Late last year the same department called tenders to deliver the new service in the Bega Valley and the Bega Chamber was successful in winning the tender. The tender commenced in March this year and as a result we have employed Rachel as our Local connector.

The program is designed to address the problem of workers moving to regional areas for work, but who struggle to settle into a new community. We will make contact with them and find out what their interests are and then link them with others already in the community with similar interests. This may include helping them find a School for the kids or arranging social events with likeminded people etc. This is a Shire wide program, and we recognise that a new worker may work at the hospital in Bega but may want to live in Tathra or Merimbula and so the program needs to cover the whole Bega Valley.

Some of you may ask what this has to do with a business chamber, however we feel it's in everyone's interest to have these jobs filled and that they stay in the area long-term. If we use the hospital as an example, it has never been fully staffed and this program will provide some help to make this happen. If we have a fully functional hospital, then everyone benefits including the business community.

### **McKee Drive Precinct**

In 2021 the Chamber conducted two mini summits where we brought together a number of community organisations to discuss their vision and plans for the future, along with issues holding them back. There was a lot of great information that was gathered through these meetings, and this was brought together in our trig report. One common issue that became clear across a number of organisations was a lack of space to expand their services.

The former Bega Hospital site in McKee drive stood out as a potential location to provide a solution, and new location for a community hub. This large parcel of land lies right in the middle of town and very close to the University of Wollongong and next door to the new TAFE. The Chambers vision is to



create a community precinct that would include facilities for organisations like Sapphire Community projects (Sapphire pantry) Fling Physical Theatre, PCYC, Tulgeen Industries to name just a few. It would also include short term housing for students at the University and the Regional Hospital, that could double as crisis accommodation such as bushfires or floods. There is also plenty of room for affordable housing.

In March we were successful in winning a grant from the Department of Regional NSW to develop a business case for the redevelopment of the site. This business case needs to include cost benefit analysis, management model and concept plans.

We have engaged the services of NGH Consulting who are working with Edmiston Jones Architects, SC Lennon and assoc. Economists and Bega Valley Data Collective.

We want to develop a plan that meets the community needs and is fit for purpose and so over the last two months we have met with over thirty organisations including all levels of Government to reaffirm the needs for the site. We have narrowed eight options down to our preferred option on a spatial plan and this will be further refined to concept drawings over the next two months.

Our business case needs to be completed by September and we have been invited to Present our plans to Council and also relevant ministers of the State Government in Sydney.

### **Member Support**

Over the last twelve months we have provided direct support to our members with:

1. Multiple meetings with Council over a range of issues
2. Meetings with Member for Bega Dr Michael Holland; many around the McKee Drive Precinct.
3. Connected many of our members with various business support organisations and provided details of many programs to help our members such as: Details about Women's Regional, Rural and Remote Diversity Scholarship 2022 program. Details about grants to support fleet managers to transition their vehicles to battery electric vehicles (BEVs) and fuel cell electric vehicles (FCEVs). To name just two.
4. Upgraded our website to include a member's page.
5. Staged networking events approximately every six weeks covering a range of subjects including the International Women's Day luncheon, Cyber Security network evening and Build your Business Expo.
6. Publish a monthly newsletter to all members and in the local newspaper each month.
7. Monthly radio spot to discuss local issues and remind residents to buy local.

Over the year your Chamber has also provided input to the Bega Show Society, Regional Housing Plan Consultants, Mappy Jobs, NSW Alliance program, Bega Valley Circular Economy, Bega Valley Data Collective, Fling Physical Theatre.

We have also provided letters of support to: Kristy McBain Member for Eden Monaro, PCYC, Sapphire Community Projects, Fling Physical Theatre, Dr Michael Holland Member for Bega, Girl Guides, Bega Show Society, Bega Circularity Centre and Bega Valley Business Forum.

### **Upcoming Year**

Over the next twelve months we will continue to expand the Welcome Experience and Tender for the extension of the program.

Finalise the McKee Drive Business case and continue to seek further funding to progress this project.

Continue to get our members listed on the website.



Install new Town entrance signs.

Take over management of the Church Street kiosk and renovate the building to encourage it's use.

Commence a program to identify improvements to the CBD and seek to have them improved.

Continue our network events on relevant topics.

Engage with the local High Schools to develop a Junior Chamber

We are planning a Spring retail promotion with a date to be fixed.

Charity event to be held at the Bega Commemorative Civic Centre on October 28<sup>th</sup>.

Christmas Retail Event in Littleton Gardens on December 7<sup>th</sup>.

Customer Service Awards in 2024

Thank you all for your contributions throughout the last year and I trust that you will continue to support your Chamber and can see great value in your membership.

John Watkin  
President