

THE ILLAWARRA *flame*

January 2026  Keeping community news alive

Shaping the future

The school, the clubs and the board makers behind a wave of surfing success



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Meet Our Contributors



Meg Wright is a journalist and podcaster whose work appears regularly in the *Financial Times*. She has also written for *Forbes*, *The Drum* and *Mamamia*. Meg grew up in the

Illawarra and recently returned after living in London. She spends her time swimming, doing yoga and drinking (too much) coffee.



Edward Birt is a committed and enthusiastic cyclist. He is the Bicycle Mayor of Wollongong and the president of the Illawarra Bicycle Users Group.



Janice Creanaune is a retired English teacher. A wife and mother of three, she volunteers for PKD Australia and her interests include travel, Letters-to-the Editor SMH,

letterpress printing and film study.



Duncan Leadbitter is a director of consulting company, Fish Matter. A keen scuba diver, snorkeller, spearfisherman and photographer, Duncan lives in Stanwell Park.

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EDITORS Genevieve Swart, Marcus Craft

CONTACT hello@theillawarraflame.com.au;
0432 612 168; PO Box 248, Helensburgh, 2508.

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, from the
mountains to the sea.

Mel Schott

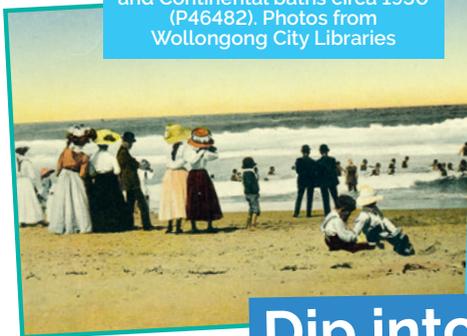
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North Beach circa 1900 (P02726) and Continental baths circa 1930 (P46482). Photos from Wollongong City Libraries



Dip into the past

By local studies librarian Jenny McConchie

How did beach-goers guard against the sun in the 19th century?

The image above of North Wollongong Beach gives us a glimpse of correct beach attire circa 1900.

Sun protection was important, however, until 1902 Wollongong residents also had to comply with regulations which forbade men and women swimming at the same time. By then a small band of Wollongong enthusiasts had begun defying regulations, resulting in the restrictions being removed.

However, it was not until 1928, with the

opening of the Continental Baths, that a mixed bathing pool was available in the city. The baths were named after the practice of French resorts where mixed sex or continental bathing was permitted.

The Local Studies Section of the library has added over 51,000 images to our Illawarra Images Collection. However, we are always on the look-out for something new. We would love to hear from you if you have something to share.

Email localhistory@wollongong.nsw.gov.au ✨

Sea Cliff Bridge turns 20

Clifton School of Arts hosted a live ABC Illawarra broadcast on 11 December

To celebrate the 20th anniversary of the opening of the iconic Sea Cliff Bridge, ABC Illawarra chose to broadcast its popular Breakfast Show from another Illawarra landmark – the Clifton School of Arts (CSA). With its sweeping views of the Pacific Ocean and its rich cultural heritage, CSA offered the perfect vantage point for presenter Melinda James to share stories of the bridge, the local community and the historic building itself.

Wollongong Lord Mayor Tania Brown dropped in to reflect on her involvement in the bridge's creation. She acknowledged its extraordinary success as a global tourist destination – and the parking pressures it has created for Clifton locals – assuring listeners that the issue will receive her attention.

CSA President David Roach spoke about the organisation's long history and its evolution into a dynamic cultural hub, now attracting more than 18,000 visitors each year to exhibitions, workshops,

literary events and performances. Committee member Kieran Jones outlined plans for the site, including new accessible facilities and a multi-purpose gallery at the rear of the building.

Other guests included Makenzie Russell (pictured with the Lord Mayor) who came up with "Sea Cliff" as the name for the bridge (in 2005 at the age of 11), and author and local historian Ruth Crowther, who shared insights into the region's past and the lasting significance of the bridge and the CSA in the life of the Northern Illawarra. ✨



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Julie York

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Memorial signage achieved

By Jenny Donohoe of Helensburgh & District Historical Society



Thanks to Wollongong City Council for the new signage in the Helensburgh General Cemetery.

Helensburgh & District Historical Society has been researching missing burials that were recorded in 2006 by Max Negel. Max worked on the Helensburgh General Cemetery Register for years and his research was via many primary documents, i.e., church registers, family history societies, local newspapers, hospital registers, NSW Death Index, Wollongong Council's Burial Register, microfiche and, importantly, local knowledge.

Limited copies of this mammoth document were printed and donated to various family history

societies, and this is where our researchers started their enquiries. Max had recorded more than 100 burials from his primary sources that were not recorded elsewhere. The question the society asked was: 'Where were they?'

In 2025, buried in the archives of the Helensburgh Historical Society, old surveyed cemetery maps were found that opened up a number of possibilities. From these maps, we discovered there were originally eight sections in the cemetery by a 1934 survey. Council's current cemetery map shows only four known sections. It appears the other four sections – numbered 5 to 8 – were covered by bushland, with some burials revealed after an RFS back-burn.

Council has now installed signs indicating the lost stillborn babies' section, near the entrance to the cemetery, and a sign marking pauper and unknown burials at the back of the Anglican section. Council is preparing another sign for the old sections 5 to 8, where burials have been found.

Acknowledgement of these unknown burials have only happened through the society's research and land surveys with the Council's Operations Manager of Memorial Gardens & Cemeteries. ✨

Join the heartbeat of emergency response

Volunteer with a Communication Brigade, writes Captain Ben Gibson

When bushfires strike, every second counts. Behind every successful operation is a team of skilled communicators keeping crews connected, informed, and safe. That's the vital role of Communication Brigades in the NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS). If you're passionate about helping others, enjoy technology, or want to assist behind the scenes, this could be your perfect fit.

What Do Communication Brigades Do?

Volunteers are the voice behind the fireground, ensuring smooth, accurate radio traffic between crews, control centres, and support teams. You'll help:

- Set up and manage radio networks
- Relay critical updates to keep crews safe
- Support incident control teams
- Assist with community education
- Help other brigades with training



Who Can Join?

No firefighting experience is needed – just a clear communication style and a willingness to learn. Training is provided. This role suits:

- Tech-savvy volunteers who enjoy radios and systems
- Strategic thinkers who thrive under pressure
- Community-minded people

Ready to Get Involved?

Search for volunteer roles at the NSW RFS website or contact Ben, Captain of Sutherland Communications Brigade, on 0477 362 224 or membership@sutherlandcommsrfs.org.au. The Sutherland brigade is based at Heathcote and Illawarra brigade is at Albion Park. ✨



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A young Sam at the festival in 2004 (photo by Graeme Morrison) and (far right) with Amaidi



Sam playing it again at 39th Folk Festival

By Illawarra Folk Festival's publicity officer, Nick Hartgerink

Multi-instrument folk music maestro Sam De Santi literally grew up at the annual Illawarra Folk Festival. The 39th Illawarra Folk Festival will be staged at Bulli Showground from January 16-18, and Sam will be there as usual, performing with two top bands and in the Fiddle Frenzy.

Sam's musician father David took on the role of Festival Director in May, 1996, and Sam was born in December the same year. David has been heavily involved ever since, so needless to say, young Sam spent a lot of his early life around folk music in general and the Illawarra Folk Festival in particular.

By the age of two Sam could play the fiddle, and when he was eight he became part of the traditional folk ensemble Wongawilli alongside his father on accordion, mother Tania (on piano), aunt Jane Brownlee (on fiddle) and other talented musicians. Tania and Jane themselves had grown up as part of their parents' old-time dance band The Marshall Mount Merry-Makers.

Wongawilli played regularly at the Illawarra Folk Festival in the decade Sam spent with the group, and he also made festival appearances with the Con Artists, from the Wollongong Conservatorium of Music, where Sam learned to play the trombone and performed with Eric Dunan's Jazz Orchestra program and the BlueScope Youth Orchestra under Tanya Phillips and Higel Edwards.

Three generations of De Santis – Sam, David and David's father Aniello (Andy) – also formed a trio to perform Italian folk songs at Italian lunches that were a feature of the festival's Friday program for years. Those shows hold precious memories for Sam, as his grandfather passed away in 2020.

"Obviously my dad has been a major influence on my love of folk music, but also my mum Tania and her sister Jane," Sam said.

Sam grew up in the Illawarra, but moved to Britain from 2016 to 2020 to study sound engineering at the University of West London. He kept up his folk music, playing gigs and linking up

with other musicians at Celtic tune sessions at pubs around London.

Now Sam is based in Brisbane, where he works as an acoustics engineer. With the Olympic Games coming to Brisbane in 2032, Sam's day job keeps him very busy.

So does his music.

In 2023 he and three other musicians formed a band they called Amaidi. In Amaidi, Sam plays banjo alongside Lachlan Baldwin (guitar and vocals), Jack Meimaris (accordion and stomp boxes) and Davydd McDonald (fiddle).

"I had to work out what instrument I could play that would fit in with what the other guys were already doing," Sam said. "They already had guitar, accordion and fiddle covered so I went with banjo, which has the same tuning as the fiddle."

In the two years since forming, Amaidi has become one of the hottest folk bands in the country – playing all the big festivals.

"It's been ridiculous really ... Woodford twice, Portarlington twice ..." Sam said.

The 2026 Illawarra Folk Festival will also be second time around for Amaidi. Sam promises a very different show. "We'll be louder, faster and play much harder than we did in 2024."

When he's not on stage with Amaidi at the Illawarra Folk Festival, Sam will play guitar with another Brisbane band, Lizzie Flynn and the Runaway Trains.

He'll also pull out his fiddle for the Fiddle Frenzy, scheduled for the Slacky Flat Bar on the Saturday afternoon program.

"The last time they had a Fiddle Frenzy it was in the Restaurant Bar, a small venue, and they had to turn lots of people away. This time it will be on a big stage, which will be great," Sam said.

The folk festival returns on 16-18 January. And on 8-10 January, the free HONK! Oz Street Music Festival will be back in the city 🌟

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How the Illawarra Flame Tree got its (English, common) name

By the coordinator of Growing Illawarra Natives, Emma Rooksby

Photographer Brad Chilby recently shared a picture of an Illawarra Flame Tree, *Brachychiton acerifolius*, on Facebook and asked why such a widespread tree is named for the Illawarra region. As Kevin Mills, editor of the ecology journal *Budawangia*, replied, Illawarra was the first settled location that had the tree, and there were many to be seen. Beyond that, there was some uncertainty.

So I had a browse through historic records on the web to see what I could find. Names are tricky things, and the Illawarra Flame Tree has gone through a few scientific name changes, but here are a few points of note.

Botanist Allan Cunningham, who visited Illawarra between 1818 and 1830 and spent time in the local rainforests, was the first European to give a botanical name to the Illawarra Flame Tree (he named it *Sterculia acerifolia*, though it was ultimately George Don's description of the species that was accepted).

I found it hard to locate a reference to the species in available versions of Cunningham's journals of his time in Illawarra, but it is widely accepted that he recorded the species in the region.

The Illawarra Flame Tree was clearly associated with the region by 1857, at least among botanists. Victoria's first 'Government Botanist' Ferdinand von Mueller wrote to Sir William Hooker that describes a range of *Sterculia* species, including one that he calls the "Flame-tree of Illawarra *Brachychiton acerifolium Sterculia acerifolia* A.C. in *Loud hort. Brit.* [1830] p. 392".

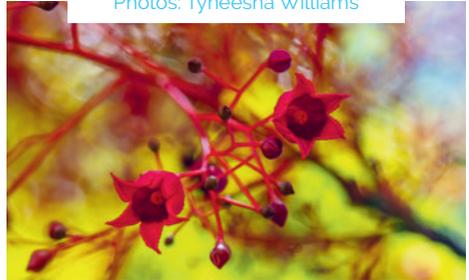
References to the Illawarra Flame Tree are common by the 1860s. The National Library of Australia's Trove includes an article in *The Leader* (a Melbourne publication) from 1867, discussing Melbourne nurseries, references *Brachychiton*s, stating: 'nothing is more handsome than the species known as the Illawarra Flame-tree.'

Trove also includes an edition of *The Freeman's Journal* from 1879, where a member of the public from Taree writes to the editor, asking about a "small tree very rarely to be met with in this colony, as it grows only in the 'mountain brushes' and then not in all of them". The writer is keen to see the tree propagated and sold by the government.

A response was provided from Mr Charles Moore, director of the Botanic Gardens of Sydney, stating: "The tree referred to in the enclosed letter is botanically called *Brachychiton acerifolium*, but commonly known as the Flame-tree – so called from the profusion of flowers of a rich scarlet



An Illawarra Flame Tree in bloom.
Photos: Tyneesha Williams



colour which it bears some seasons. It was first discovered in the Illawarra district, and has a known coast range of at least 300 miles. Curiously enough it only loses its leaves when about to flower, which only occurs at intervals of several years. In some localities it is called kurrajong, as a strong and useful fibre is obtained from its bark. The wood is spongy and of no commercial value."

This article was first published last year, in volume 155 of *Budawangia*, edited by Kevin Mills. Since then, I have learned two Dharawal names for the Illawarra Flame Tree. One is Weery Wegne from the website Dharawal Words and the other is Couramyn, a name included in an article by Graham Avery titled "Doctor Ellis' Dharawal Plant names" published in *Australian Plants* (vol. 32 no. 261). 🌸

New Year Extra Care

With significant new services arriving at Equilibrium Healthcare in 2026, we're here to help you feel your best, mind and body, so you can make the most of the year ahead.

Start the year with a health check with **Dr Ashleigh Crompton** who is thrilled to start consulting with us this month. Dr Crompton joins us from the UK, bringing specialist GP training and strong interests in women's health, antenatal care, family medicine, and aged care.

Adding to our psychology services, **Catherine Ryan** and **Kate Dimarco** both hold Masters in Clinical Psychology and will be consulting from February.

Catherine provides compassionate, evidence-based care for adolescents and adults. She supports clients with anxiety, trauma, sexual health, and more, while remaining actively involved in the local community.

Kate supports children, adolescents, and adults with concerns such as anxiety, low mood, emotion regulation, and relationship difficulties, using warm, evidence-based approaches.



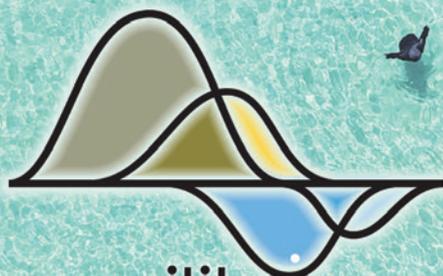
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We need more dog parks

By Meg Wright



Wollongong City Council has just closed a review on its Dogs on Beaches and Parks Policy. The findings could present a pivotal opportunity for the Northern Illawarra amid calls to alleviate pressure on beaches and protect native wildlife.

Let me begin by setting the record straight: I love dogs. I need to say this up front, for it's clear that dog parks make for divisive discourse.

It's easy to see why. Rates of dog ownership in the Illawarra have doubled in the years since 2010. At last count, Wollongong Council estimates that there are 40 dogs for every 100 people in the region, or more than 86,000 dogs in total.

Wollongong now ranks as Australia's ninth most pet-friendly region according to data from Muval. Yet our infrastructure has not kept pace with our growing canine population: Wollongong is home to just 4.7 dog parks per 100,000.

By contrast, there are 15 dog parks per 100,000 in Nowra-Bombaderry. Woof.

Why we need more dog parks

There are six off-leash dog parks in the City of Wollongong. Only one of these is in the Northern Illawarra: Proud Park in Helensburgh.

"Dogs leave scents, urine and faeces, which can

disrupt animal behaviour long after the dogs have left," said Curtin University's Associate Professor Bill Bateman, in response to new research that shows pet dogs disturb and directly harm wildlife, particularly shorebirds, even when leashed.

"Others may feel their individual actions won't make a difference, leading to a 'tragedy of the commons' where shared spaces like beaches and woodlands suffer cumulative degradation."

This was the basis for one of the recent recommendations that would have had Wollongong City Council shrink the off-leash area at McCauleys Beach to preserve the increasingly exposed rock platform and surrounding areas at the southern end of the beach.

While the council's findings are that dogs are exacerbating – not causing – this fragility, a vocal number of locals would have you believe that council is barking up the wrong tree.

Why we need fewer dogs on beaches

This is where we reach the crux of our dogged debate. In the region north of Puckey's Estate, dogs are allowed on 16 of the 20 beaches at least some of the time. This is in contrast to Shellharbour (dogs are not allowed on any beaches in the LGA) and the southern Illawarra – where just four beaches offer dog-friendly access.

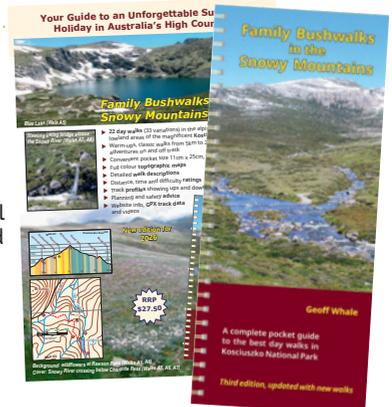
A "tragedy of the commons" is, I fear, what awaits many of our beautiful northern suburbs beaches if we don't take remedial action. Regardless of your stance on dogs on beaches, or whether or not you have a dog, or whether or not you would use a dog park, there are no net downsides in lobbying council to provide the option for more off-leash dog parks in our community.

It may not be a perfect solution, but it's a doggone step closer to one. 🐾

GUIDE TO

Holidays in the High Country

Bulli local Geoff Whale – the author of *Northern Illawarra Beachwalks* – has just released his third edition of *Family Bushwalks in the Snowy Mountains*, a popular pocket-sized field guide that features 22 walks (33 variations) in the alpine, subalpine and lowland areas of Kosciuszko National Park, from one-hour warm-ups to classic tracks. It has detailed full-colour topographic maps; step-by-step descriptions; distance, time and difficulty ratings; track profiles; and planning and safety advice. Buy the book at Collins Booksellers Thirroul and Bushcraft Equipment in Wollongong, RRP \$27.50. Visit grwpub.info/snowy 🌟





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Cool, calm co-work space opens

By Genevieve Swart

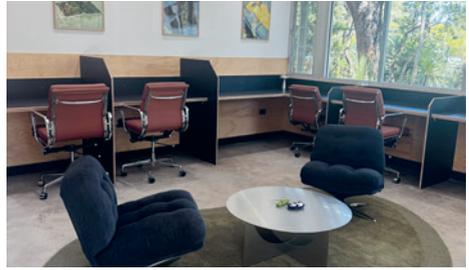
If you've been dreaming of a co-work space where the chief distraction is bird song, now is your chance to take up an affordable offer in Helensburgh.

Andy Offord, the owner of HBP + Storage, has launched the new HBP + Workspace in the former cafe site at Helensburgh Business Park, where his daughter Jade has used her design skills to create an airy, modern office.

Unit 21, located just inside the gates at 17 Cemetery Road, is now a welcoming co-work space with high-speed WiFi in a tranquil setting, overlooking a native garden with banksias, kangaroo paws and native rosemary.

"We're going to get a bird bath," says Jade, who is managing the new space and has already had a few professionals book a desk for a day. "There's the most beautiful native birds that come in here."

A pop-in pass costs \$35 a day, regular hot-desking is \$25 a day for a 10-pack, with monthly options also available. There are seven desks plus two private partitioned offices, which will cost about \$895 a month.



"We wanted to keep it affordable," Jade says. "We're flexible and I'm willing to move with the community and what they want."

The co-work space is priced to attract small businesspeople, and it's in the perfect spot. About 20 local enterprises, including Crawchy's Swim School and Switched On Mechanical, operate out of the hub of industry on Cemetery Road. The new co-work space also complements existing services like HBP + Storage, the Offord family's secure facility for everything from documents to vehicles.

HBP + Workspace is cool, calm and air-conditioned, set up with WiFi, an A3 printer and tea and coffee facilities. New Eames-style office chairs slide in under desks lining the walls, with lounge chairs and a coffee table (just waiting for a birdwatching book) in the middle.

The HBP team are also planning to open a cafe next door, plant a small kitchen garden and build a boardroom so meetings can take place here too. The cafe will be a hole-in-wall style outlet behind the office, keeping things fresh and simple with barista coffee and takeaway sandwiches.

But all that will have to wait.

As this issue went to press, Andy Offord was focused on tackling one world's toughest and most prestigious yacht races, the 2025 Sydney to Hobart, which traditionally departs from Sydney Harbour on Boxing Day. What's more, he was planning to do it two-handed. Sailing with a friend from the UK on the yacht *Borderline*, Andy is part of a growing double-handed division testing the limits of skill and endurance on the iconic 628-nautical-mile race to Tasmania.

In the meantime, back home in Helensburgh, HBP + Workspace is open for business, ready to welcome anyone wanting to stay fresh and focused over summer.

HBP + Workspace is at Unit 21 / 17 Cemetery Road, Helensburgh. Visit www.hbpstorage.com.au or phone 02 4294 1197

Sing with SPAT

By Lauren Mitsak of Stanwell Park Arts Theatre (SPAT)



SPAT Singers ended the year performing carols to over 100 residents at Donald Robison Anglican Retirement Village in Kirrawee. We also sang to the residents of Hillcrest in Stanwell Park.

If you enjoy singing, playing a musical instrument or both, The Spat Singers will welcome you with open arms. We meet every Friday evening at the Stanwell Park CWA Hall at 7pm from January 23rd.

PANTO SOLD OUT

The 2025 panto, *12 Hours 'til Christmas* – written by SPAT members Rachael Kiddier and Christine Higgins and directed by father/daughter duo Tom and Katie Peach – was a huge success. It was the first time in our 51-year history that all five performances were sold out before the end of November. We can't thank our patrons enough. Ideas for this year's program are coming in. Stay tuned. ✨

A bushwalk manifesto

By architect Ben Wollen

Once upon a time, architects wrote manifestos. Today, we hire marketing strategists to draft vision and mission statements. I'm not sure if that's progress or decline – it's just something I've been wrestling with since my business coach sent me out into nature to "find inspiration".

I like my coach. Unlike the textbook, always-positive, Tony Robbins-style entrepreneurs I've had before, she's more like a Buddhist with marketing nous. She runs yoga classes, meditates, lives simply in northern NSW (at least through the Zoom lens), and – uniquely – told me to sit on a boulder under tall eucalypts until I figured out what drives me.

I'm not naturally introspective. My old statements were straightforward enough...

Vision: To save the planet one house at a time.

Mission: To help clients realise their dream home, aligned with their sustainability goals and budget.

Clear. Pragmatic. Job done. But, apparently, too flat, too uninspiring. Harumph.

So I went on a bushwalk. I wrote a poem. I almost stepped on a red-bellied black snake, and



stumbled into quicksand-like mud. I didn't return with a sparkling mission statement, but I did return with a thought: where once we wrote manifestos, now we write slogans.

At university, we studied manifestos – polemic, unapologetic, defiant. Wright's *The Art and Craft of the Machine*. Le Corbusier's *Towards a New Architecture*. Fuller's *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth*. Even Vitruvius, 27 BC, with his *Ten Books on Architecture*. At their peak, the Futurists shouted theirs from newspaper front pages.

Somewhere along the way, manifestos gave way to corporate neatness. But maybe it's time to reclaim them. A manifesto was always two things:

- A rally against what's broken.
- A set of principles for a better way.

Perhaps vision and mission statements don't need to be abandoned – only re-infused with the boldness and honesty of a manifesto.

I left the bush not with answers, but with this: "Architecture should be more than a business plan. It should be a call to arms." ✨

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Time to Paint

Ahead of the 2026 Thirroul Seaside Festival, which returns from March 27-30, Janice Creenaune meets Bulli artist David King, winner of 2025's Art Prize

David King is a trained classical guitarist and opera singer with Opera Australia who is now making a name for himself in the painting world, including winning 2025's Thirroul Seaside Festival Art Show.

David says he can be introverted, but if given a chance to talk about his oil paintings he opens up.

"I pour myself willingly into everything I do, a kind of all-or-nothing type of attitude."

He currently has a solo exhibition in the Michael Reid Gallery in Berrima in the Southern Highlands, on until February 8.

"I may only have recently resumed oil painting but I am conscious of my past experiences that also fold into my works," David says. "My music career

and opera work intrinsically envelop into my works and seem to add extra dimensions in my paintings.

"I always sketched, even when working with the opera company, and now I realise it is never too late for anything."

David says art offers him a 'normal' life and, in particular, his own timetable. "It was very difficult with both guitar and voice work because the timetable and work was so erratic and strictly controlled ... my art allows me to settle and set goals in which to strive.

"Port Kembla Steelworks in particular has offered much inspiration for my works. The rusty and decaying infrastructure I can capture on canvas and develop my own style. I can easily throw fear away in my paintings and sculptures, probably my past in performance has easily allowed this to happen. Yet I experience the same thrill in painting as I do on stage.

"I used to feel it on stage when you go beyond mere notes and transcend the original, it is uplifting and offers complete freedom."

David paints in an impasto style, offering illusions of depth and reflections of light. "I love working with oil. I love the texture and the more the better as far as I am concerned," he says.

David credits his mentors, local artist Paul Ryan, author Amber Creswell-Bell, and his wife Jo, who have all been essential in his success. This has included winning Thirroul Seaside Festival's 1st Prize, as well as the Handler's Prize for 2025. 🌟

An uplifting send-off

By Paul Blanksby of Helensburgh Men's Shed

What do trees, family, school, and symbiosis have in common? I found the answer at Holy Cross Parish Church during the Thanksgiving Mass.

For nearly a decade, your Men's Shed has been carving small timber crosses for the Holy Cross School Year 6 children to hold as a memory of their time at this lovely place of learning, where hope, compassion, integrity, and justice lay a firm foundation as they graduate to high school.

The kids were moving on, from a small school established in 1900 by Australia's first Saint, Mother Mary MacKillop, and the Sisters of Saint Joseph. Father Paul Clark's mass was uplifting, with the school choir raising our spirits, particularly with their beautiful Latin rendition of *Salve Regina*.

And what did the spirit of year 6 look like? Teacher Christopher Whitehall put it well in his farewell speech: the spirit of the kids was energetic, caring, compassionate, and competitive. Student



Owen, a recent arrival from Wales (welcome, mate), was so happy at how he was welcomed. Kai was encouraged by the connections he made, and Emma, who won the MacKillop School Community Award, loved to help others.

Being at the church, with views of wooden crosses and living trees out the window, I saw how the school kids, staff and parents were one great family, having developed this wonderful symbiosis for mutual benefit. So, fitting, then, that the kids spent their afternoon at the water park at Symbio. Got to work off those cupcakes somehow! Your Men's Shed is so happy to play a part in this story. 🌟

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Coalcliff couple win doco award

By Tyneesha Williams

Members of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are respectfully advised that this article contains images and names of deceased people.

A Coalcliff couple who donned hazmat suits to venture into Australia's largest contaminated site and cover a campaign to clean up Banjima Country have won 2025's Walkley Documentary Award.

Yurlu | Country is set in the former asbestos mining town of Wittenoom, Western Australia. In the film, director Yaara Bou Melhem and cinematographer Tom Bannigan follow the final year of Banjima Elder Maitland Parker and his fight to save his people and their ancestral lands or 'Yurlu'.

"He was a very outspoken and powerful character who wanted to set a few historical wrongs right, talk about the history and try to get people to clean up his country," Tom says.

The Banjima Elder called his homelands "Poison Country". It's a truth filmmakers say was etched into his own body – Maitland had mesothelioma, an aggressive cancer caused by asbestos exposure.

"I think he was a very brave person, because he let us into his life and he let us film him at some very vulnerable moments," Tom says.

"He never worked in the mine, but he was exposed to all these asbestos tailings."

"He was a very natural storyteller, and he felt that he wanted to tell this story about his people, the Banjima people."

Yurlu | Country focuses on the blue asbestos mining that has poisoned Banjima Country and its people for 80 years. Sixty years after the mine's closure, there are still three million tons of asbestos

tailings on the ground. Aboriginal people in the Pilbara have the highest death rates of mesothelioma in the world, and Banjima people like Maitland are still suffering.

"In terms of the death toll from man-made disasters like Chernobyl, I think Wittenoom is number five on the list," Tom says.

"Over 2000 people have died so far from asbestos-related diseases."

Yaara and Tom are married with young children and have also collaborated on a 2021 documentary, *Unseen Skies*. Originally, they began making a film about old mines in Australia, taking an interest in the estimated 60,000 abandoned sites across the country, including the old coal mine at Coalcliff.

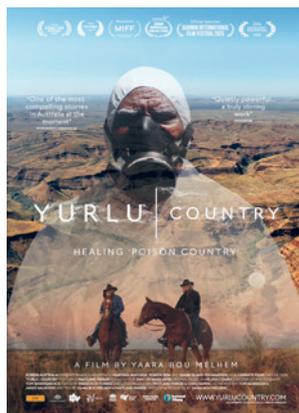
"But instead we went to Wittenoom," Tom says. "We decided to make a film to highlight the fact that there's been very little remediation of these places."

The crew was small, often only Tom and Yaara, and filming involved high temperatures, long-distance travel and the unpredictable nature of Maitland's illness.

"For some of the filming, we're dressed head to toe in something like a hazmat suit ... and we had to decontaminate every time we went into the contamination zone. And it's probably about 50°C."

Tom and Yaara hope the film continues to drive action. Banjima people are running a #CleanUpWittenoom campaign. Allies can sign their names online at cleanupwittenoom.com, pledge their support, and #WalkWithBanjima.

Watch *Yurlu | Country* at a cinema near you or sign up to host a screening via yurlucountry.com/take-action. 🌟



Filmmakers Yaara Bou Melhem and Tom Bannigan. Photo: Adam Hollingworth/Walkley Foundation

INTEREST RATES ON HOLD — WHAT IT MEANS FOR 2508 & 2515 PROPERTY MARKETS

The RBA held the cash rate at 3.6% on 10th of December, its last meeting of the year for 2025. They noted that inflation remains sticky and the jobs market was performing well. While the broader economy continues to adjust, the decision signals a period of stability ahead, with most economists expecting rates to stay on hold well into 2026.

For buyers and sellers in the 2508 and 2515 postcodes, this steady-rate environment is a double-edged sword — but overall, it's a welcome one.

Ian Pepper 0403 570 041
Joshua Pepper 0437 790 052
ian.pepper@agencyhq.net.au
joshua.pepper@agencyhq.net.au
9/17 Cemetery Road, Helensburgh

Across our coastal suburbs, from Helensburgh to Thirroul, we've seen a slight increase in available homes this spring. This modest oversupply means buyers currently enjoy more choice, particularly at the upper end of the market. Rate stability won't immediately tighten conditions, but it does help restore confidence.



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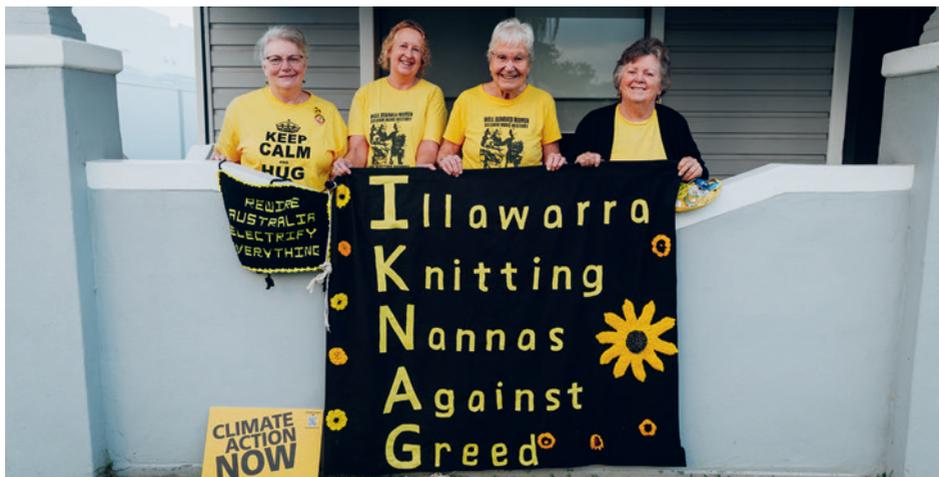
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Knitting together a future

By Tyneesha Williams

“Well behaved women seldom make history”, the bold black and yellow T-shirts of the Illawarra Knitting Nannas Against Greed (IKNAG) proclaim.

All due respect, but when the time comes to record the local fight for environmental justice, the Nannas will definitely be making the history books.

For more than 10 years, IKNAG (the K is silent) has been campaigning for a better world, using everything from knit-ins to knitted signs and wit as sharp as needles to make a point.

“Our overall aim is to work to protect the environment for our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren – for future generations,” Nanna Cherry says.

“This encompasses a range of work – including protecting our air, water and biodiversity, respecting First Nations culture, taking action on climate change, and trying to stop deforestation.

“We are not seen as threatening,” adds Nanna Anne, “and perhaps not always taken all that seriously – but we should never be taken lightly.”

The Illawarra’s Knitting Nannas cast on well over a decade ago, when community concerns over the risks of coal seam gas mining triggered big protests in the region. Originally, the group was known as the Illawarra Knitting Nannas Against Gas.

The campaign to Stop CSG in the Illawarra resulted in the government of the time buying back the petroleum exploration licences and protecting the drinking water of about 5.3 million people.

After this success, the Nannas changed the word ‘gas’ to ‘greed’ and continued to lobby politicians, undertake actions, participate in rallies, write submissions and letters asking for action on the

environment, and work with like-minded groups, from Electrify Illawarra to the Wilderness Society.

“Our main priorities are working to stop mining in the drinking water catchment; calling for action on climate change; promoting electrification in the Illawarra; and the need for a just transition for workers from the fossil fuel to the renewable energy industries,” Nanna Cherry says.

Nanna Anne adds: “As older women, we can honestly say that we’re not working for us, we’re doing everything we can to help build a sustainable environment for future generations, clean air and water, biodiversity and a liveable climate.”

In their environmental actions, the Nannas use peaceful defiance and enjoy weaving in a bit of fun.

“We like to use humour,” Nanna Anne says.

“One of the signs at the IKNAG pre-election rally read: ‘Wearing socks with sandals is a sin, so is nuclear energy.’ It makes a big difference, you’ve got to laugh, and it draws people in – makes it easier for them to stop and have a chat.”

When it comes to sharing their message, Nannas Cherry and Annie are renowned for crafting beautiful signs, while Nanna Margi – a poet who likes to write parodies – has a talent for saying it through song. Inspired by the Sydney Nannas who do satirical takes on well-known songs, at an electrification rally last year, Nanna Margi sang ‘Electrify ... I will survive’ based on *I Will Survive* by Gloria Gaynor outside the council chambers. “It just lifted the morale and enthusiasm.”

Contact IKNAG via [Facebook](#) or call Nanna Cherry on 0408 674 305. 🌻

Food Allergies: What parents need to know

By Dr Nikita Robins of Bulli Medical Practice

Australia has one of the highest rates of childhood food allergies in the world. One in 10 Australian babies develops a food allergy in their first year, though this drops to around 6 in a 100 by age ten. The good news? Most children outgrow their allergies – 9 out of 10 kids with egg allergies will no longer be allergic by age six. We don't fully understand why food allergies are becoming more common, or why Australia seems particularly affected. But here's what we do know: early introduction of allergens can make a real difference.



Introduce one allergen at a time, and once introduced, keep it in your child's diet at least twice a week. Trying a food, then avoiding it for long periods may increase allergy risk.

How to Introduce Allergens Safely

Offer allergens in age-appropriate forms like hard-boiled egg or smooth nut butter. You can mix a quarter teaspoon into foods your child already enjoys, like pureed vegetables. Start by rubbing a small amount inside your child's lips. If there's no reaction within a few minutes, offer a small taste. It's best to try new foods during the daytime when you can monitor closely.

Starting Solid Foods the Right Way

The key to allergy prevention is simple: introduce common allergens from six months of age, making sure major allergens – especially egg and peanuts – are part of your child's regular diet by their first birthday.

The major allergens include: egg, peanut, cow's milk, tree nuts, soy, sesame, wheat, fish, and shellfish.

Need More Information?

For detailed guidance including a fantastic factsheet on introducing solid foods for allergy prevention, visit the Australian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy at www.allergy.org.au. If you have questions or concerns, book an appointment with your GP! We're here to support you every step of the way. 🌟

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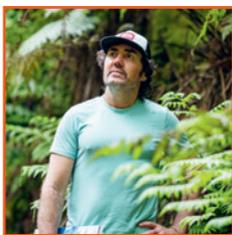
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QUALITY PERSONAL HEALTHCARE AND TRAVEL MEDICINE

Clearing up misconceptions

By James McCormack, editor of Wild Magazine

By now, because the 2025 court case was splashed all over, you likely know that Peabody Energy, owner of the Metropolitan Mine in Helensburgh, pleaded guilty to three offences relating to pollution incidents back in 2022. Back then, filthy, black, polluted waters from the mine flowed into Camp Gully Creek in Garawarra State Conservation Area, and then into the Hacking River in the Royal National Park.



Many assumed the incident with Turkeys Nest Dam was a mere accident. It was not. Nor was it unforeseen. The mine knew the dam was not fit for purpose, and so did the EPA.

We know this thanks to the court proceedings. Unlike the fine, usually quoted at \$500K – the actual fine was only \$196,560; the rest was payment for the EPA's legal and investigatory costs – the nitty gritty of the case was not widely discussed.

I am among those who didn't at the time read through the court proceedings in full. I should have, because here are two key facts they told us:

- That in 2019, three years before the offences, the mine was made aware that Turkeys Nest Dam, the site of the polluted water breach, was highly silted and more than half full. While some steps

were taken to work on this, the court found these processes were “limited”, and that “a consistently high volume of sediment” remained.

- That in 2021, an independent environmental audit concluded the sediment pond “was silted up and no longer provides adequate freeboard to prevent sediment discharges”.

Wait a sec! The Metropolitan Mine knew all along that Turkeys Nest Dam was not up to scratch? And so did the EPA? Despite this, in the years prior to the September 2022 pollution incidents, the mine was allowed to not seriously get to work addressing the problems at hand.

One last misconception is the issue of rainfall. The court noted there had been heavy rainfall in 2022. However, in the weeks prior to the first, and more significant, pollution event in September that year, the rainfall was actually below average.

In short, I believe the culprit for these events was not the rainfall; it was the lack of action on the part of the mine, and the lack of enforcement by the EPA. As a community, let's apply more pressure to both organisations to do what's right for the local environment and its people.

We deserve better. ✨

Is it our year to electrify Bulli?

By Elsa Evers of Electrify 2515

Should we expand Electrify 2515 to Bulli?

Changes in federal government subsidies mean there's an opportunity to invite more households to join the Electrify 2515 Community Pilot.

Home battery installations have been going bananas since the introduction of the Federal Cheaper Home Batteries rebate, not least in our local area. The subsequent reallocation of battery subsidies from the Electrify 2515 Community Pilot has created an opportunity to help incentivise more homes to get off gas and go all electric.

Excitingly, we could subsidise more homes with existing gas appliances to switch to efficient electric ones such as electric hot water systems, induction cooktops, and reverse cycle A/C. We want to ensure the pilot research is meaningful, impactful, and provides a snapshot of the electric future. Expanding southward could be a logical choice.

Three good reasons to electrify Bulli

1. Bulli shares a substation with the existing pilot

area. This makes it a logical extension of pilot research on our local grid to better understand the impacts and opportunities of electrification.

2. One-third of all Bulli households already have solar. Almost 1000 homes in Bulli are already powered by the sun! Now that feed-in tariffs have fallen, it makes sense to soak up all that solar with electric appliances like heat pump hot water systems that heat up during the day.

3. Three hours of free electricity everyday. For households without solar, new rules coming in next year will mean many households in NSW will have access to electricity plans that offer three free hours of electricity during the middle of the day. So it's smart to heat that hot water and crank the A/C during your three for free!

What do you think? Should we electrify Bulli in 2026? If you live in Bulli and would like to register your interest in joining the pilot, visit Electrify2515.org/apply ✨

Below left: Tania Jones, Green Gravity's sustainable development manager, with the award. At right: The Electrify team were among the finalists. Photos: Banksia, Hamish Quinn



Bright sparks at Banksia Awards

Local innovators were in the spotlight at 2025's NSW Sustainability Awards

Recognition keeps coming for Green Gravity, the local clean technology innovator that aims to repurpose old mine shafts as energy storage hubs and provide a long-life alternative to chemical batteries. Capping off a big year of accolades – including wins at the Illawarra Business Awards – the company was honoured with the Climate Technology for Impact prize at the Banksia Foundation's 2025 NSW Sustainability Awards.

Presented at the Australian National Maritime Museum on December 9, the Banksia Award celebrated Green Gravity's efforts to "radically accelerate the world's renewable transition".

Also flying the Illawarra flag were the team at the Electrify 2515 Community Pilot. The community-led project was a finalist in the Placemaking category, won by Eurobodalla Shire Council for its Wagonga Inlet Living Shoreline project. 🌟

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Sydney commuter wins Frequent Visitor Award

By Duncan Leadbitter

Each tagged shark has a unique number and so each year I have been allocating a frequent visitor award. On one level, it's a bit of fun but it's also interesting to get a sense of whether there are patterns of behaviour. Bear in mind that, as per last month's article, there is a lot of variability from year to year and I only analyse one listening station.

On the flip side, it's amazing that the listening stations pick up as many sharks as they do given that they have such a small detection zone (about 0.5 square kilometres). So, for 37 listening stations in 12,600 square kilometres of NSW state waters (2,100km coastline out to 6km offshore) that's about 0.15% of state waters listening for tagged sharks.

Unlike last year, when one great white visited 10 times, this year four whites visited twice and the rest only once.

This year the visitation record was held by bull shark no. 795. Those with an eye for detail will remember this shark as not only the most frequent bull shark visitor from last year but the winner of the inaugural award in 22/23 and the first shark to turn up two years in a row, and now three.

Number 795 was also dubbed a Sydney commuter as it was previously detected off Sydney beaches several times before checking out Stanwell Park. But 795 has a more complex swimming history, having done a tour of the Mid North Coast in the 23/24 sampling year before spending a busy month in January 2025 between Sydney and Shellharbour.

The detection buoys collect a lot of data. There have been some detailed scientific papers produced but it's not that clear how all this protects bathers.

I often sit on the headland at Stannie and talk with the boardriders, most of whom simply ignore the pings, if they even have the app.

For the swimmers, the lifeguards and life savers have their tower and their jet skis to protect those who swim between the flags. ✨



The screenshot shows the SHARKSMART app interface. At the top, there is a blue header with a back arrow and the text 'SHARKSMART'. Below the header, a red warning triangle icon is followed by the text 'High Risk'. In the center, there is a detailed illustration of a Bull Shark. Below the illustration, the text reads 'Bull Shark', 'Weight: 130 kg', and 'Size: 2.4 m'. At the bottom of the profile, the text reads 'Stocky shape. Flat snout.'

Weed: Blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus*)

Blackberry is a native European plant that was brought over to Australia by the first colonists, thinking it was a good thing to do. However, it soon became highly invasive. There is some blackberry in the Illawarra, but much of it has been overtaken by the even more invasive Lantana.

Native Raspberry (*Rubus parvifolius*)

Native raspberry has prickles up the stem, but they are much smaller than blackberry thorns. The blackberry's leaves are much larger, 3 to 5 lobed and each lobe is oval shaped and serrated. Native raspberry is common in the Illawarra and it is an important food source for birds. ✨



Local lookalikes

By Kieran Tapsell of Banksia Bushcare

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Descendants muster for Mary's 250th

By Genevieve Swart

The English convict girl who escaped the hangman to become an Australian matriarch with more than 15,000 descendants – including former PM Kevin Rudd – is being celebrated in Wollongong.

Not only is Mary Wade's story starring in the new She Shapes History tours that launched late last year, but in November more than 50 descendants gathered at Wollongong Surf Leisure Resort to mark the 250th anniversary of her birth.

"We had a range of generations represented, including a few 9th and 10th generation people," said Dennis O'Brien, president of the Mary Wade Family History Association.

Born in London, Mary stole a cotton frock and a cap, was convicted of highway robbery and condemned to death at age 13. That sentence was commuted and instead she was banished to Australia, sailing from Portsmouth in May 1789 aboard Lady Juliana, a ship of all-women convicts nicknamed 'the floating brothel'.

She landed in Sydney in the winter of 1790.

"I think Mary would be amused to think that her family has spread itself all over this continent and even New Zealand," Dennis said.

"She has among [her descendants], a Victoria Cross winner (World War Two), Gallipoli veterans, a Prime Minister, the founder of Milo, and many hundreds of adventurers who farmed the outbacks of NSW and Queensland. We believe she would be pleased at the contribution we have made."



The family meeting, aka "muster", featured DNA talks, family tree displays and bus tours, including a stop at Pioneer Park, where Mary is buried near the old entrance to the cemetery. She died on her 84th birthday, 17 December 1859, leaving behind many grand and great-grandchildren.

A highlight was the 250th Celebration of Mary's Birth. "We had some early colonial music with a sing-along with a member who played her ukulele," Dennis said. "At the dinner we cut a cake and sang Happy Birthday to Mary and the candles were blown out by two of our youngest descendants who were attending with family. That was great."

One of Mary's best-known descendants, now the US Ambassador, made a guest appearance. "We also had a video presentation from His Excellency Kevin Rudd, 26th Prime Minister of Australia."

Mary Wade features in new walking tours in the city, visit sheshapeshistory.com.au 🌟

NF1 Report

By Warwick Erwin, convenor of Neighbourhood Forum 1 (2508 area)

Neighbourhood Forum 1 meetings will be held in the Helensburgh Community Rooms in front of the old Community Centre on the second Wednesday of the month (Feb – Nov) in 2026. Forums are independent groups, supported by Council.

Aquatic & Indoor Sports Strategy

Council is developing an Aquatic & Indoor Sports Strategy (see Council's Our Wollongong webpage) and it does not include an indoor sports centre in 2508. Take the survey, give feedback by Feb 8.

Helensburgh Community Centre

The existing Community Hall that has been used as an auditorium with stage, indoor sports court (basketball, netball, soccer, volleyball and others), events space and seated about 400 people is to be demolished by Council once the new Community Centre and Library is built. According to limited

information from Council, the new main meeting room will seat less than 200 people – based on Council's statement of it being three times the size of the current community room (old youth room) with no stage, backstage areas or indoor sports courts, but it will have "bush views". The new centre of about 1000m² will be far smaller than the combined area of the current Library and existing community hall complex and have fewer facilities. Looks like the original Helensburgh Railway Station sign may remain in storage a lot longer.

Vera St washaway (April 2024)

There remains only one lane access to Helensburgh Station with no information from Council on when it or Tunnel Road's two washaways will be repaired.

Next NF1 meeting: 7pm on 11 February at Helensburgh Community Rooms 🌟



Alison Byrnes MP

Labor Member for Cunningham

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

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Health by stealth: A new year's resolution for our city

Cheers to a wellbeing economy! By Kelly Andrews, CEO of Fairy Meadow-based charity Healthy Cities Australia

A healthy city embraces a healthy economy – and not the kind defined solely by Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Around the world, governments are shifting to a Wellbeing Economy approach: measuring success by whether people, communities and the environment are thriving, not just whether output is rising.

Wales is widely recognised as a leader. Its Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 places a legal duty on public bodies to work long-term, prioritise prevention, and collaborate to achieve seven wellbeing goals – prosperity, resilience, health, equality, cohesive communities, vibrant culture and a globally responsible Wales.

Wales has gone further in November 2025 by embedding Health Impact Assessments – independent appraisals of how proposed decisions will affect physical and mental health – and stipulates that public bodies must publish and take these into account. In short: health is designed into the decision process, not an afterthought.

I participated in a UNSW Cities Institute Panel discussion recently that focussed on Health Impact Assessments, and the advantages of local planning authorities engaging with public health professionals. Professor Liz Green, one of the world's leading Health Impact Assessment experts and drivers of the Welsh Wellbeing Economy, was our keynote speaker.

I reflected on how we, in Australia, must do better – we are in a climate crisis, a mental and physical health crisis and our ways of working are not sustainable. In February 2025, Independent Federal MP Dr Sophie Scamps' Private Members Bill to introduce a Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill 2025 was voted down. Safeguarding future generations' health and wellbeing – not passed. Let that sink in for a minute.

I am and will continue to be an optimist. I believe there is now a shift to “peoples' right for health” conversation, and how local planners and health teams can work together to embed health and wellbeing in our cities and communities.

If you are an urban planning or public health professional reading this, you may like to join our Healthy Urban Environments Communities of Practice – a network dedicated to transforming urban environments to put people at the heart of design: more affordable homes near jobs; safer, greener streets; cleaner air and waterways; active



transport networks; social connection and cultural vibrancy; and prevention as the default. Health isn't a separate issue that lives in hospitals – it's the byproduct of good urban policy decisions.

Australia is beginning to move in the right direction. The Commonwealth launched Measuring What Matters, our first national wellbeing framework and dashboard, in 2023. It tracks progress across five themes – Healthy, Secure, Sustainable, Cohesive and Prosperous – via 50 indicators and is being updated annually by the ABS. Australia is also strengthening prevention nationally. The National Preventive Health Strategy 2021–2030 sets a 10-year, systems-based agenda to reduce chronic disease and improve equity, with clear targets and priority actions across risk factors such as nutrition, physical activity, tobacco, alcohol and mental health. In parallel, the Commonwealth has legislated the Australian Centre for Disease Control to start as an independent agency on 1 January 2026 – an important platform to coordinate communicable disease preparedness.

Healthy Cities Australia is proud to be part of the Australian branch of the Wellbeing Economy Alliance, a global movement. When we advocate for walkable neighbourhoods, green spaces, affordable housing, and integrated health planning, we're championing the same principles that underpin a wellbeing economy – people and planet first, not GDP and profits at their expense. Health by Stealth. But this movement needs voices – your voice. Join Healthy Cities Australia as a member and help us shape cities that prioritise health and equity. Visit healthycities.org.au 🌟



SCWC 2026 POETRY AWARD

RESPONDING TO
THE THEME 'STATES'



Calling poets

By SCWC's Elizabeth Heffernan

Submissions are now open for the South Coast Writers Centre's 2026 Poetry Award. This year's theme is 'states', inspired by and in collaboration with the Wollongong Art Gallery exhibition *Set States*, which features video works by Kate Mitchell exploring shifting psychological states – states of mind, action, play and being. (Pictured above is Kate's *Hypnotised into Being*, 2016.)

Presented in dialogue with works from the Wollongong Art Gallery collection, *Set States* invites new connections between contemporary Australian video art and historical representations of human agency, ritual, and transformation. The exhibition considers themes of play, perception and performance, suggesting that to "set states" is to be actively engaged with the world, however unstable it may be.

Last year, the SCWC Poetry Award was judged by Judith Beveridge, recent recipient of the Creative Australia Lifetime Achievement in Literature Award, and honoured six award winners from more than 230 entries.

This year, the Award will be judged by esteemed poet Julie Janson, co-recipient of the Oodgeroo Noonuccal Poetry Prize 2016 and winner of the Judith Wright Poetry Prize 2019, and Peter Frankis, Chair of the SCWC board.

First Prize will receive \$1000. Second Prize, the Ron Pretty SCWC Member Award and the Wollongong Art Gallery Ekphrastic Award will each receive \$100. All winning entries will be published in the 2027 *SCWC Anthology of Writing*.

For more information, and to book a spot in the Poetry Award workshop run by Ali Jane Smith in February at Wollongong Art Gallery, visit the SCWC website.

Visit southcoastwriters.org ✨

Staff picks for 2026

With the team at Collins Booksellers Thirroul

Happy New Year, book lovers! Now comes the fun of spending those Xmas vouchers. As you browse, look for our lists of 2025 Favourites.



There are staff picks – Caro's Bios, Sue's Crime, Kate's 8 – or ask us for recommendations. We have holiday reads for adults as well as books and activities to entertain the kids. The much-loved Mini Makers Market will be back on Sunday, 18 January, which gives kids a chance to get creative, then sell their wares on market day. On Sunday 25th we're thrilled to be hosting an event for Zoe Gaetjen's new picture book, *Being Indy*. This beautiful book is about trying to fit in and the value of being yourself – a wonderful message for all kids this new year. Enquiries for all events at the bookshop. Happy holidays! ✨

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Cover
feature

Shaping THE FUTURE

Tyneesha Williams explores how schools, clubs and local businesses are helping a new wave of young surfers excel at a sport that's great for mind and body



Above: ISHS surfers Jesse Fitzgibbon and Ruby Neill with coaches David Hyslop and Geoff Latimer. Photos: Tyneesha Williams, Andrew Shield/Surfing Australia



Ashton Mekisic



Alice Hodgson



Taj Air

Illawarra Sports High School is riding a wave of national success after taking the win in the under 19 boys MR Shield (Schools) title at the Australian Junior Surfing Titles 2025.

Under 18s Thirroul surfer Taj Air and under 16s Austinmer surfer Ashton Mekisic competed in the prestigious MR Shield, leading ISHS to victory on home sand against the top young surfers from across the country from November 18 to December 5.

School surf coach David Hyslop says the results are testament to the calibre of surfers in the area.

“It was a really impressive week. All the kids performed incredibly, they all should be super proud,” David says.

“You’re competing against some renowned schools on the Gold Coast that have produced world champions. It just shows the dedication the boys have put in and the commitment to the program at Illawarra Sports High. Getting results like that is incredible.”

The success wasn’t limited to the boys’ team. Illawarra Sports High’s under 19 girls MR Shield team – Lani Cairncross and Alice Hodgson – excelled, securing second place nationally.

Individually, the school’s talent was on full display, with five star athletes – Ruby Neill, Lani Cairncross, Alice Hodgson, Ashton Mekisic and Taj Air – all competing for the national title in their divisions. An impressive four out of the five young surfers came out equal third in Australia.

Geoff Latimer, talented surfing program co-ordinator at Illawarra Sports High, says the surfing talent on our coast at the moment is second to none.

“We can see from the results over the past week that the future is bright for surfing coming out of the Illawarra and South Coast region,” says Geoff.

The Illawarra Sports High School surfing program started almost 15 years ago, helping talented young surfers hone skills during their high school education. The athletes train once a week through the program, working on technical skills and scenario-based training ahead of competitions, but much of their development is fostered by community support outside of school hours.

Ruby Neill from Kiama Downs competed in the under 14 girls semi-final and secured national third place at McCauley’s Beach at Thirroul early on the morning of Friday, December 5. The dedicated young surfer joins her friends and Jones Beach Boardriders in the water almost every day.

“I like how I can go surfing with all of my mates, and it’s just a good thing to bring us all together,” Ruby says.

“I just find it so peaceful. When I go surfing, it just takes all my stress away from school and stuff, and it’s just fun.”



Ruby’s success reflects a rising number of local girls and young women supported by their communities in the Illawarra to reap the benefits of surfing as a healthy activity and achieve as athletes in the sport.

Grant Neill, Ruby’s dad, says her involvement is “an identity for her, a sense of community”.

“She’s got a great little surfing community where they’re just all cheering each other on, really supportive of each other, and there for each other,” Grant says.

“She’s surfing seven days a week – just every single day, and that promotes a healthy lifestyle. She’s eating healthier because of it, she’s training harder. We surf, we live close to the beach, she and her friends and the community surf – it’s just a sense of community that keeps her surfing.”

With the national titles complete, ISHS surfing students are looking forward to 2026, hoping to achieve even better results at the Australian Interschools Surfing Championships in May.

“There’s always room for improvement and we’ll keep working towards it, striving to get better to be the best version they can of themselves,” says Geoff.

“Sometimes there’s the dangling carrot of that trophy but the results are good indications that what we’ve been working on is starting to show fruition.”



Ruby Neill (left) and Lani Cairncross (below) are two star athletes at Illawarra Sports High. They also represent a rising number of girls making waves in the Illawarra. Autumn 2026 will see the return of Woonona Boardriders' Ocean Queen Classic, the only all-women surfing contest in NSW. Photos: Tyneesha Williams, Andrew Shield



Hometown support buoys Jed to heights

Sandon Point surfer Jed Ashton took the win at the 2025 Australian Shortboard Open Men's Titles, riding the waves he grew up surfing.

"I got the opportunity to go in the Aussie titles and it went my way... It's a pretty sick achievement. I'm still frothing over it," Jed says.

"It was awesome, especially to do it back at my hometown... the support on the beach, hearing the cheers and everyone screaming after a good wave... definitely, definitely fires you up."

Growing up in the northern suburbs, Jed, 22, was drawn to the high-performance culture of the local surf scene. For him, the ocean offered more than just sport – it was somewhere to relax.

"Catching waves with your friends and being in the ocean is a sort of relief from everything," Jed says.

"There's always a good crew down there, it's always fun, good banter and stuff"

Looking up to older, more experienced surfers such as Joel Wood and Benny Duncan, Jed decided to "get serious" about surfing in year 8.

"I wanted to be like them, so that's when I sort of put my head down and I was like, 'all right, I want to do it,'" Jed says.

"I think my first surf comp was the Illawarra titles, actually... Maybe under 15s or under 16s. Then I was up against Joel Wood and Benny Duncan, all those boys, and I was in the final with all of them, which was pretty crazy."

Following his win last August, Jed received overwhelming praise from his family, friends and other members of Sandon Point Boardriders and the wider surf community.

"It was crazy, I was going through my socials for probably like two hours after I won, just going through messages and people calling me... saying congratulations and stuff. It was pretty overwhelming, I did not think it was going to be like that.

"Sandon Point Boardriders, obviously, were supporting me heaps, and all the locals there... I couldn't thank them enough. They helped me to get to the position I am today.

"Big, big thanks to Mum and Dad too for giving me the opportunities that I have."

His long-time shaper, Parrish Byrne from Byrne Surfboards, showed confidence in Jed's victory, making the win even more special.

"I saw him [Parrish] after I won the comp, walking up the hill. He was like, 'I'm not surprised, mate. It was only a matter of time.' So that's awesome. It's pretty good to hear that."

Facebook @sandonpointboardriders



Boards still the Byrnes' passion after nearly 50 years

Taylor and Parrish Byrne are the friendly faces of Byrne Surfboards – a family business run by two brothers born and bred in Thirroul with an international reputation as a renowned surfboard-making brand.

Parrish said he and Taylor got into surfing “because it’s in our blood – our father and his brothers all grew up surfing.

“We always try to give a family feel to the people who come to us for boards and advice – they become part of the family. Not just competitive surfers, but any of our clients that we do boards for,” he says.

Byrne Surfboards was started in 1977 by Taylor and Parrish’s father, Phil, and his brothers, Dave and Chris. The original factory was in Fairy Meadow, and earned national respect for innovative, quality craftsmanship. For decades, the Byrne family have shaped boards for local grommets and star surfers alike.

In 2014, Parrish and Taylor moved the business to Thirroul and began working to continue the family legacy.

“Over time, the main focal point for surfing for the Illawarra had moved from the city of Wollongong out to the northern suburbs,” says Parrish.

The surf shop on Railway Parade offers a collection of boards, surf gear, merchandise and importantly, a place to come together. The on-site cafe and lounge often serves as a meeting place for surfers looking for a cuppa and a chat. With services and advice available locally, the shop helps bring the benefits of surfing to the shore.

“You can come into this store and we can push you in the right direction – whether you’re a beginner or an advanced surfer, we’re always here to help,” Taylor says.

“My kids have just started surfing too, and sometimes I’m in the water with my dad and kids – three generations of people in the water together, which is pretty rare and it’s good to see,” Parrish says.

The brand sells boards across Europe, Japan, Indonesia, South America and mainland America. Coming up to 50 years in 2027, the brothers are proud of the Byrne legacy and continue to aim higher, expanding to even more countries.

The company is committed to giving back to their community, sponsoring pro surfers, boardrider clubs, Thirroul Surf Life Saving Club and football clubs such as the Thirroul Butchers Rugby League Club.

“Me and Taylor both played for the Butchers as kids, my kids too. We want to look after the area that’s looked after us,” says Parrish.

[Visit byrnesurf.com](http://byrnesurf.com)



Parrish Byrne with his sons and his dad, Phil. At top: Taylor (left) and Parrish

Boardriders help foster Scarborough flair

Ian Pepper grew up near the ocean in a surf-crazy community – but it took moving to the Illawarra to join a club which lives and breathes friendship through sharing the salt-water passion.

Scarborough Boardriders Club offers up to 200 members a healthier, more connected lifestyle, both in and out of the water, says Ian, the contest director, and a club member for about 15 years.

“You suddenly create a group of friends across all those different zones from here down to Austinmer that you can meet very quickly, and you’ve all got something in common because you all surf,” he says.

A finance and real estate professional, Ian was raised in the Shire and began surfing as a child with his dad, often spending school holidays surfing in Coledale. With a busy work schedule, he moved south as an adult to escape the rat race and now, through the club, he and his sons have formed lasting friendships with other surfers in the area.

“We all end up coming down here surfing, and then eventually when we buy a house, we often come down here to buy one. I’ve been here 25 years now – my kids have grown up here, they’re lucky,” Ian says.

Aside from the physical health benefits of regular exercise, members of the club become part of an inter-suburb web of connection.

“I’ve got really, really good mates now that are all down there at Coledale and Austinmer, and I wouldn’t have met them otherwise, only through Boardriders,” Ian says.

The club fosters intergenerational friendships and learning through their extensive junior divisions (including micros, 10 & under, 12 & under, 14 & under, and junior girls) and their senior divisions (over 35, 45 and 55). Junior programs ensure young members have opportunities to learn and develop skills.

“The over 35s, over 45s, over 55s are some of our biggest divisions. You get to meet people across the different beaches as well and enjoy surfing,” Ian says.

“If they’ve got kids, same thing, it’s great for them to start early, and then come all the way through the micros and the young kids, because we really spend a lot of time with them. We take them away to events, which is a really great bonding thing as well.”

The club limits membership to about 200 people, to ensure events are manageable with a limited volunteer base. Registration typically opens in mid-January after the annual general meeting.

Facebook @Scarbsboardridersclub



Ashton Mekisic photo by Andrew Shield/Surfing Australia



Dylan Perese, owner of DP Surfboards at Bulli. Photos: Kyle Ford, Tyneesha Williams

Swell of support carries surfboard shaper

Dylan Perese didn't exactly make his first surfboard before he could walk – but it wasn't too long after. And like catching a break from an offshore bombie all the way to shore, it has already been one crazy ride.

Now owner of DP Surfboards at Bulli, Dylan began surfing while he was in primary school at Scarborough Public School, and it wasn't long before he shaped his first board.

"I'd taken an interest in surfing, and I was always making skateboard ramps and that sort of stuff as a young kid," he says.

Dylan started his shaping career by taking old surfboards and having "enough curiosity about me to want to strip the fibreglass back and then have a go at hacking out some kind of shape that resembled a surfboard".

This curiosity quickly transitioned into a business. In year 7, Dylan started to make custom-made surfboards.

"It all came from me making boards for myself,

and then my cousin ordered one, and then he had a friend who wanted one, and then it just snowballed," he says.

"It kind of became evident that school was taking a back seat. Surfboards and this little business I'd started had taken over my life."

In 1999, teen Dylan opened the first DP Boardroom in Thirroul. Supported by his mother and father, the business began to grow as a local name.

The business moved south and centred on a small factory in Mollymook before Dylan moved to Cronulla and began working under the guidance of industry guru Graeme King.

As the DP label grew, Dylan outgrew the idea of working for other businesses. He established a factory in Ulladulla, then opened a second retail outlet in Thirroul where the brand spent 12 years. For years, Dylan juggled the two sites before consolidating at the current space in Bulli.

"I get a lot of satisfaction out of making things and seeing how they work, and then watching my team riders surf them and get good results – or just average guys or girls riding boards and having a big smile on their face, really enjoying the ride.

"Our main goal is to continue to do the best we can, keep the customer service there, and keep plenty of time for each individual customer, maintaining an individual and personal rapport with the people who buy boards from us."

Visit dpsurfboards.com.au 🌟

TVC looks back on 2025

By Annette Jones, secretary of Thirroul Village Committee

2025 will be indelibly imprinted on many people's memories as the year we lost a champion of Thirroul, Murray Jones. The Thirroul Village Committee is looking at establishing a permanent memorial to Murray, so if anyone has any ideas, please email thirroulvillagecommittee@gmail.com.

Northern Suburbs Skatepark

The TVC has long championed a skatepark in the northern suburbs. Late in 2025 Wollongong City Council (WCC) presented its preferred location – WF Jackson Park. Concerns were raised over its proximity to the busy Lawrence Hargrave Drive. Prior to Christmas WCC released survey results that showed strong support for WF Jackson Park. Planning and design will now progress.

Bulli Bypass

Before Christmas Transport for NSW (TfNSW) gave an update on the feasibility of linking Memorial Drive to the M1 Princes Motorway and Bulli Pass, saying due to steep terrain and a history of underground coal-mining, construction would be too difficult and expensive. This is disappointing news for the community, given the many issues with the ageing Bulli Pass. TfNSW stated it will continue to investigate a range of options, including connections via the escarpment, a bypass of Bulli town centre within the reserved road corridor, and improvements to Bulli town centre and the Princes Highway.

Thirroul Plaza

In 2025 Save Thirroul Village and the TVC tried to keep in contact with plaza development manager Louis Goulimis, who told us the project is in the "testing-of-concept phase". Once completed, the concept will be presented to the community. This is expected in early 2026. Then plans will go to the Housing Delivery Authority, responsible for assessing Expressions of Interest to determine if the residential development should be recommended to proceed as a State Significant Development.

Amy Street (Lot 303)

On 28 October the Development Application for a dwelling on a small part of Lot 303 zoned R2 was approved, with conditions, by the Wollongong Local Planning Committee. The majority of the lot forms a Green Corridor of C2 (Environmental Conservation) land – about 7 hectares in size – between Hewitts and Woodlands creeks, Thirroul. There is strong support to have the land brought into public ownership. A rezoning of part of the C2 land to C4 (Environmental Living) could be a way to move forward (at no cost to ratepayers) by separating most of the C2 land from the R2 area.

Good news

Thanks to the success of the Thirroul Telstra mural, street artist Jack Miller Hendry has been commissioned to do more on Telstra properties, including Corrimal Telephone Exchange. 🌟

NIRAG/NF3 Report

By Ross Dearden, secretary of Northern Illawarra Residents Action Group (NIRAG)

Amy Street, Thirroul: DA 2025/374

NIRAG is concerned for the potential loss of public accesses to McCauley's Beach, and management of the C2, Environmental Conservation part of the land, a vital Green Corridor. NIRAG has met with the GM Greg Doyle and Council has now agreed to review the strategic need for public ownership.

6–10 Southview St, Bulli

Homes NSW's proposal to replace 3 existing homes was revised – but the revised plan has only reduced the height of the northern part of the building! It is still a non-compliant 3-storey block of units in a R2 zone. Ahead of consultation closing on December 18, Heathcote MP Maryanne Stuart organised a public meeting at Sandon Point surf club with CEO of Homes NSW, Rebecca Pinkerton, set to attend. Maryanne has strongly advocated to support

residents' concerns that this is a R2 zoned area with a 2-storey limit. It will be a missed opportunity if this project does not show how social housing can be integrated with private homes. This site is also outside the 800m distance from essential services as required by the Mid-Rise Housing Policy.

Draft Illawarra Shoalhaven Strategic Regional Integrated Transport Plan

Released by Transport for NSW, with feedback due by 6 February. Disappointingly, the draft seems to have few actions that support improved frequency or speed of rail connections (either locally or to Sydney) or improvements to local public transport. Submissions to engage sritps@transport.nsw.gov.au

Next meeting 11 February at Bulli Community Centre. email nirag@bigpond.com 🌟

Remembering The Hon Edward 'Ted' Pickering AM (1939–2025)

By Ted's daughter, Deborah Hewes



The Hon Edward “Ted” Pickering AM, former NSW Cabinet Minister and long-serving Member of the Legislative Council, passed away on 2 December 2025 at the age of 86. His life was marked by public service, intellectual discipline and

a strong belief in accountability and fairness.

Born in Newcastle on 1 November 1939, Ted was the eldest of three children and grew up in a close-knit family with strong community and church roots. After excelling at Newcastle Boys High School, he pursued a part-time degree in Chemical Engineering with UNSW. He did the seven-year course while working full-time at BHP Steelworks. In 1964 he moved to the Illawarra, working in the Coal Preparation industry.

Ted went on to hold senior roles, managing coal preparation and coke production plants and later establishing his own consultancy, Coal Tec Pty Ltd.

Ted and family moved to Stanwell Park in 1972, and he lived there for 34 years. Elected to the NSW Legislative Council in 1976, his parliamentary career spanned nearly two decades. He served as Leader of the Opposition in the Council, then as Leader of the Government and Minister for Police

and Emergency Services, later taking on the portfolios of Justice, Energy and Local Government. Ted was a central figure in reforms that modernised policing and justice in NSW, believing public institutions must serve the community not the powerful. He championed accountability and strong oversight, and he believed in doing what was right even when it was difficult. When Ted gave his word, he stood by it.

A notable moment in his parliamentary life was his decision to cross the floor to support anti-union legislation – an act of principle. His work also contributed to the establishment of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) and later informed the Wood Royal Commission into police misconduct, shaping integrity standards that endure today.

After retiring from politics in 1995, Ted travelled widely and purchased an olive grove in Mt Hunter, which became a focal point for family gatherings. It was a chapter that brought him great happiness and connected generations of the Pickering family.

Ted was married to his first wife, Elaine, for 56 years until her passing in 2015. In 2017 he married Carol Van Der Water, who brought him comfort and joy in his later years. Finally, Ted moved back to his beloved Stanwell Park, residing in Hillcrest Village. He is survived by Carol, his five children, 14 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. ✨

Support CWA cake stall

By Jan Johnston, Stanwell Park CWA publicity officer

Did you hear about our hosting a Pop-Up Community Dance Event at the CWA Hall? It was “No Lights No Lycra”. The children’s session was held first, and they had a lovely time dancing in the dark. The adults’ session followed with a smaller number of brave dancers benefiting from the feel-good adrenalin that comes from dancing in the dark. Keep an eye out for this successful and fun community event again this year.

Our hall is a great location for children’s birthday parties. Especially now that the covered balcony area has been upgraded with a child-proof gate. The hiring rates are very reasonable!

Darkes Glenbernie Orchard donated a percentage of their gate takings to Stanwell Park CWA after their successful Apple Day last August. We followed up with a thank you, a CWA recipe

book and homemade goodies and, in turn, farmer Jo Fahey treated us to a morning tea of apple pie and a tour of the orchard.

On our agenda in the new year is a BBQ and cake stall at Bellambi Bunnings on 14 February. Final rosters will be organised at our monthly meeting at 10am on Tuesday, 3 February at the CWA hall, 15 The Drive, Stanwell Park. All are welcome. Please support us on the BBQ day (14 February) by coming and enjoying our great cakes and yummy sausage sandwiches. ✨



The benefits of cycling to work

By Ed Birt, president of Illawarra Bicycle Users Group (IBUG)

There's no better way to achieve your fitness goals than through the incidental exercise that comes with riding to and from work.

Consider this: the average commuting distance in Wollongong is 15km. Think of getting into Wollongong from Thirroul, Dapto, or Windang – all roughly this distance. Of course, many people live much closer. Wollongong's Cycling Plan aims to increase cycling-to-work trips from a modest 0.7% to 2.0% of commuter journeys.

A 15km commute is in the sweet spot for 45 to 60 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity each way. This means if you live 15km from work, riding just two days per week will meet the recommended guidelines of 2.5 to 5 hours of moderate-intensity physical activity weekly. Cycling to work delivers three major benefits:

- You get to work
- You complete your recommended weekly physical activity
- You save money on petrol and vehicle maintenance.

Based on the average fuel consumption for passenger cars in Australia (11.1 litres per 100km), cycling your 15km commute twice per week over 48 working weeks will save you:

- 2880km of vehicle wear and tear
- 317 litres of fuel (which produces 757kg of CO₂ when burnt)
- About \$570 in fuel (based on \$1.80 per litre)

Seriously, what's not to like?

This brings me to an important point: how to get back into cycling to work. Jumping on your bike on a busy Monday morning is not the right approach. While you may fondly recall your youthful cycling skills (and I don't doubt them for a minute), if you haven't maintained them, they will have declined.

A demanding work week is not the time to discover this. So get both your bike and your body ready with regular weekend rides. Inform your boss or team when you plan to ride to work, so they won't be surprised if you arrive slightly later or less polished. Join the Illawarra Bicycle Users Group (IBUG) to meet people through programs like "Bike Buddies", which supports women in gaining confidence and cycling in our city.

Visit ibug.org.au ✨



What's on at your library

Summer Book Sale

12–23 Jan Browse hundreds of pre-loved titles. All books are 50c each, or bring and fill a bag for \$5!

Native Garden & Bush Medicine Talk

Mon 19 Jan 6–7pm Thirroul Library. Join Jesse for a yarn on the living kin of our native plants – learning their personalities, healing qualities, and the ways they care for our bodies, spirits, and Country. Free, bookings via Eventbrite.

Author Talk with Kate Rowe

Thurs 29 Jan 6–7pm, Thirroul. Join LGBTQIA+ activist Kate Rowe as she shares her journey through addiction, trauma, Ironman races and ukulele jams. Her memoir, *How the F*ck Would I Know?*, is a raw and uplifting story of self-discovery. Afterwards, Kate will perform with her band, Wahine Soundz. Free. Book via Eventbrite.

The Big Summer Read Storytime

Wed 7 Jan 10.30am (Thirroul)
Fri 16 Jan 10.30am (Helensburgh)

School Holiday Activities

Fri 9 Jan 2pm Movie (Helensburgh)
Tue 13 Jan 3pm Book Bedazzling (Thirroul)
Fri 16 Jan 10.30am Pet Rocks (Thirroul)
Mon 19 Jan 10am Butterfly Experience (Thirroul)
Wed 21 Jan 2.30pm K-Pop Demon Hunters Trivia (Helensburgh)
Tue 20 Jan 10am D&D Dungeon Crawl (Helensburgh)
Wed 21 Jan 10am D&D Dungeon Crawl (Thirroul)

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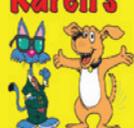
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Why seals show us their flipper

ORRCA's Jody Langlois shares what you need to know about seals on our shores



A seal sighting often draws a crowd, but it can also cause confusion. Is the seal injured? Why is it waving its flipper? Should we call for help?

The good news is that most of the time, these seals are perfectly healthy and simply resting and regulating their body temperature.

When seals hold their flipper out of the water, many people assume they're waving or in distress. In fact, they're thermoregulating. Seals use their flippers to control their body temperature, raising them to warm up or dipping them in the water to cool down. It's much like sticking a foot out of the blanket at night for us humans to cool down a little.

Hauling out (coming ashore to rest) is also part of a seal's routine. Just like us, they need time to rest and recharge. When seals haul out on busy beaches, especially off-leash dog areas, it's important for everyone to act responsibly.

We often hear dog owners say, "My dog is friendly!" and refuse to put their dogs on a leash while passing a hauled-out seal, but seal safety isn't about whether your dog is friendly, it's about preventing risky interactions. Seals are wild animals. If they feel threatened or concerned, they can defend themselves aggressively. It's easy to tell when a seal is uncomfortable. Warning signs include:

- Lifting its head suddenly or making loud grunting or hissing noises
- Moving or lunging forward
- Opening its mouth or baring teeth (also seems like "yawning")

If you see a seal on the beach, you should stay at least 40 metres away (80m if you have a dog), keep dogs on a leash at all times, do not feed, touch or approach the seal and call ORRCA's 24-hour rescue hotline on 02 9415 3333.

By giving these seals space to rest, we can ensure they continue to visit our shores safely.

To find out more about ORRCA, please visit www.orrca.org.au 🌟

Swim celebrates an inspiring recovery

By James McFarlane, president of Coalcliff SLSC

The Dave Winner Beach to Bombie Swim made a triumphant return for its second year on November 16, with more than 80 swimmers tackling the 2km course.

The Beach to Bombie is named in honour of Life Member Dave Winner.

Coalcliff Surf Life Saving Club, with support from Equilibrium Healthcare and Ohana Ocean Athletics, organises the annual event, which brings together competitive athletes, recreational ocean lovers, and a passionate local community.

The 2km course begins at Coalcliff Beach, goes out to the Bombie reef break, around the marker buoys and back to shore. This year's event again showcased the best of Coalcliff – its beauty, friendly spirit, and commitment to surf safety.

Harry Came (M 20–29) claimed victory in 23:40 (1.5km), while Ivy Gerstner (F 15–19) delivered an exceptional performance, finishing second overall in 25:06 and securing the women's division title.

Bringing this event to life is a whole-of-club effort, and our members take enormous pride in delivering it each year in honour of Dave Winner. His legacy as our long-time Chief Training Officer continues to shape the culture of Coalcliff SLSC, and this swim is our way of celebrating the impact he's had on surf safety, our volunteers, and the wider community.

A swim with a powerful purpose

Since 2023, the event has carried profound meaning for Coalcliff SLSC and the broader community. It now honours Dave Winner, a beloved life member whose extraordinary survival story has become a national call to action.

In 2021, Dave suffered a catastrophic surfing accident at Coalcliff Beach – breaking his neck, drowning, and going into cardiac arrest. His life was saved only because nearby bystanders knew CPR. In a remarkable twist, one of them had been

trained by Dave himself during his years as Coalcliff's Chief Instructor.

"One day, the life you save may be mine," Dave often told his students. In 2021, those words proved true.

Following his recovery as a partial quadriplegic, Dave launched the Dave Winner Foundation with an ambitious mission: to train one million Australians in CPR for free by 2030. Supported by the IMB Bank Community Foundation, the organisation now delivers free online and in-person CPR courses nationwide and is developing a new CPR training app designed to put life-saving knowledge at every Australian's fingertips.

"The day that I had my accident, when I broke my neck and drowned and went into cardiac arrest, the ocean decided to throw me back onto the rocks, and two young blokes knew how to do CPR," Dave said. "If they weren't there and didn't know what to do, I wouldn't be here today."

With strong momentum, heartfelt community support, and a growing national impact, Coalcliff Surf Life Saving Club is excited to confirm that the next Dave Winner Beach to Bombie Swim will return on 15 November 2026. 🌟



Photos: Coalcliff SLSC

Port Kembla Tidal Chart

January 2026

TIME	M	TIME	M	TIME	M	TIME	M
1	0013 0.44 0654 1.81 TH 1348 0.29 1940 1.24	10	0228 1.32 0818 0.69 SA 1412 1.31 2041 0.51	19	0250 0.51 0928 1.77 MO 1615 0.29 ● 2206 1.23	28	0432 1.59 1128 0.52 WE 1715 1.13 2252 0.55
2	0109 0.44 0749 1.91 FR 1445 0.18 2040 1.26	11	0318 1.34 0927 0.73 SU 1505 1.18 ● 2123 0.56	20	0330 0.49 1004 1.79 TU 1649 0.27 2244 1.27	29	0540 1.67 1244 0.41 TH 1835 1.14
3	0204 0.43 0844 1.98 SA 1539 0.11 ○ 2134 1.28	12	0412 1.38 1044 0.72 MO 1612 1.10 2210 0.60	21	0411 0.48 1041 1.78 WE 1724 0.26 2322 1.30	30	0000 0.53 0644 1.77 FR 1345 0.29 1940 1.19
4	0259 0.41 0935 2.01 SU 1629 0.09 2227 1.29	13	0505 1.43 1158 0.67 TU 1725 1.06 2302 0.62	22	0455 0.48 1119 1.74 TH 1759 0.27	31	0101 0.49 0742 1.86 SA 1439 0.20 2033 1.25
5	0352 0.42 1025 1.99 MO 1716 0.12 2315 1.29	14	0558 1.49 1258 0.59 WE 1832 1.07 2355 0.62	23	0004 1.34 0541 0.50 FR 1159 1.67 1835 0.30		
6	0444 0.44 1113 1.91 TU 1802 0.18	15	0646 1.55 1345 0.51 TH 1927 1.10	24	0048 1.38 0632 0.53 SA 1242 1.56 1914 0.35		
7	0004 1.29 0535 0.48 WE 1159 1.78 1845 0.26	16	0044 0.61 0730 1.61 FR 1427 0.43 2013 1.13	25	0135 1.42 0730 0.57 SU 1331 1.43 1957 0.41		
8	0051 1.29 0626 0.55 TH 1243 1.63 1925 0.35	17	0129 0.58 0812 1.68 SA 1504 0.37 2052 1.17	26	0228 1.47 0839 0.59 MO 1431 1.29 ● 2045 0.48		
9	0139 1.30 0719 0.62 FR 1326 1.47 2003 0.44	18	0211 0.55 0850 1.73 SU 1540 0.32 2130 1.20	27	0327 1.52 1000 0.58 TU 1547 1.18 2145 0.53		

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Helensburgh Sunday Social Golf Club

By Robert 'Indy' Jones

Sunday, December 7 was chilly but that didn't stop Treasurer Scott's Christmas festiveness – his hat and the lights on his cart were major distractions to other players. Groups were evenly matched in this Ambrose event, with handicaps ranging from 8 up to the sons of old masters playing together with 14.

The elder Gersbacks, Tony and Bruce, joined with Rob Carter and Greg Ford to top the scoring after handicaps with a blistering 47 to win the Presidents Cup and gift vouchers, ahead of the O'Connors, Rosco and Indy, with 51. On-course the money flowed once more with cash prizes, courtesy of the treasurer's personal plumbing. Lucky winners included Daniel, Frank, Bruce, Rob C., Brett, Chucky, Peter and Rosco. The chips were a tasty take-home for Ryan, Daniel and Ben where their handicap didn't help.

The HSSGC end-of-year lunch was held at Red Nectar, with a wonderful selection of roast meats, salads and fresh prawns served to members and plus-ones. We were also not denied an oration by El Presidente who, in his inimitable style, delivered a summary of 2025 achievements and failures as well as mentioning Mark's tardy arrivals, despite his astonishingly early arrival on the last day of the 2025 season, and his gift of a comic alarm clock. Fortunately, the rest of us were saved from parody.

Thanks to Christian's Meats and Helensburgh Golf Range for their support and to Red Nectar.

We now look forward to our "Loud Shirt Day" on January 18 (8am Tee-off), followed by February 8 (8am Tee-off) and March 8 (8:30am Tee-off).

Call Tony on 0418 863 100 for membership details and register your attendance and cart requirements on the Tuesday before each event.

Indy signing off: New Year Resolutions... Find a club that actually works, hit fades and draws on purpose, stop abusing the ball, stop buying new gear and just have fun. 🍀

Tradies Social Golf

By Barry Thompson

Another enjoyable Presentation night at Tradies finalised our 2025 season. Congratulations were extended to our trophy winners and the committee were thanked for their sterling efforts.

Dave Tipping topped the bill claiming the A grade Handicap Championship, the Club Championship, and the Sanders Cup. It is said he had to reach for the Dencorub after walking to the podium so often. Well done, Dave, it was truly your year.

Craig Murphy won the B grade Championship, while Geoff Hammond took the C grade trophy. Hayden Overton won the Matchplay and Eclectic titles. Well-deserved, gents!

The Fun Day event played at Boomerang was our final event. Some members complained that Fun and Golf have only a nodding acquaintance, so the event had been mis-named.

I am in a Christmas spirit, so I will not embarrass the participants by publishing the results, suffice to say that our nominated charity, NINA, will receive a donation on the club's behalf.

Our AGM was held at Tradies, and all committee positions were declared open. As a reward for their efforts, the incumbents were duly re-elected – yes, even Terry.

Our long-term Minister for Catering, John Towns, retires from the post, but will serve as Vice-President. Thanks for your efforts, John.

Presso Terry thanked Tradies and our other sponsors for their continuing support.

Our 2026 campaign starts on Saturday, January 17 at Boomerang. Tee-off at 7am – please arrive early to assist our starters. 🍀

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