

NGT welcomes letters and other contributions received by email or post prior to deadline. Letters longer than 300 words may be edited for length, and articles for accuracy. Please include your full name, address and phone number for verification purposes. Opinions expressed remain those of the author, and are not necessarily those of NGT.

**Disabled access**

Recently I put an item on Nimbin Hookups about the Nimbin Post Office being inaccessible for persons in wheelchairs. I admitted a personal interest, having recently broken my leg, but said that it is of wider concern for a public building to be accessible.

The reason I was given for not having a small ramp is that it is an historical building.

There appeared to be widespread support on Hookups for some rectification. One kind person posted a copy of the *Disability Discrimination Act*, which plainly states that it is against the law for public places to be inaccessible for a person with a disability.

Surely this lack of access must affect lots of other locals and also for our many visitors. Ironically, there is now a disabled parking bay directly outside the Post Office.

Any help to fix this issue would be appreciated. Please email: [dougpinch@gmail.com](mailto:dougpinch@gmail.com)

Doug Pinch  
Nimbin Hospital

**Fukushima**

For those who are deluded that the fuel pools at Fukushima were not damaged when the buildings were blown up, consider the plans now to dump all that radioactive water, stored temporarily in flimsy tanks, into the Pacific.

Know too that those three melted down reactor cores are still down there... somewhere where no man or robot can go, and there is an underground river flowing all over it into the Pacific for the last seven years and pretty much forever.

Then there's those temporary 30 million one-

tonne bags of radioactive topsoil all around Japan for the Olympics with nowhere to go but down and out into the Pacific eventually. See: [www.rt.com/news/441473-fukushima-wastewater-dump-pacific](http://www.rt.com/news/441473-fukushima-wastewater-dump-pacific)

Much of these waters were from the spraying of sea water over the plant, which created buckyballs of isotopes that as sea spray and dew and rain can easily travel 300km inland and salt the earth, radioactively, for millenia. See Dana Durnford on youtube: <https://phys.org/news/2017-09-multiple-fukushima-nuclear-cleanup.html>

Peter Godden,  
Nimbin

**Holding out for trains**

I've been talking for some time about the need to have trains running on our railway tracks again. Not just for those who can't drive, but to get cars off the roads to cut carbon emissions.

Because our rail extends from Casino to Murwillumbah, any loss of the tracks along the route affects the whole railway. Tweed Council have the funding to build a rail trail from Murwillumbah which seems likely to involve taking up the railway tracks. We could lose the chance to have trains again, and another opportunity to act on climate change.

I feel more saddened and scared than ever with the latest predictions about climate change, and we have a government that refuses to admit it's even happening. It seems that ruthless corporations are in control, and the science fiction stories of destruction of the Earth could come true.

We have elections coming in the next few months that will determine our response to climate change for the next few years. These are the crucial years to save the future for our children and we need to vote accordingly.

We need trains for everyday use, but we need our planet to survive. In Lismore and Murwillumbah we can vote for both by voting for Greens candidate Sue Higginson.

Beth Shelley  
Booerie Creek

**Forest health**

We are writing to alert you to the devastating effects that the invasive weed lantana and a disease known as Bell Miner Associated Dieback are having on native forests along the east coast of Australia.

The accelerating decline in forest health has major economic consequences for forestry, tourism, recreation, beekeeping, and other local industries. The NSW government is currently assessing the management of public forests and assumes that nothing can be done for dieback-affected forests, other than to cut them down.

Native forest dieback might be a complex problem, but it has a simple solution. The key is to remove lantana from forests and keep it out until the bush naturally regenerates. Even severely affected forests are valuable assets that can be restored to self-sustaining health in a cost- and time-effective manner.

Our 30-minute video, *Curing Bell Miner Associated Dieback on Creek's Bend*, with its three-minute trailer, explains how forest dieback is being cured on our property, Creek's Bend, in Toonumbar, NSW.

The YouTube link for the full video is: <https://youtu.be/s4zINkKPESU>

Feel free to contact us to discuss how we might be of further assistance regarding this issue.

Susan and Wayne  
Somerville, Toonumbar

**Wentworth by-election**

I doubt Morrison and Shorten understand why the Coalition was defeated in Wentworth by-election. I am confident the electors of Wentworth know exactly why they chose Dr. Phelps.

I know why I was delighted that she was elected, and here are my reasons for that delight:

The flip side of loving kindness is hating malevolence. Both are, without exception, aspects of human nature. The worth of a civilised community, and a cultured person, may be judged by the creativity of one balanced against the destructiveness of the other. Should hating malevolence tip the scale, communities will suffer lawlessness, alienating bigotry and political corruption.

Australia suffers lawlessness: the banking establishment is guilty of dishonesty; our politicians are dishonest in word and deed; our treatment of refugees breaks international law with its brutality; Australia's justice system allows the cruel treatment of children and Aboriginal people – criminal by any acceptable standards.

Australia suffers alienating bigotry: prejudice against



indigenous Aboriginal people is endemic; prejudicial hate speech is commonplace; Australia is overtly anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim.

Political corruption has become the norm in Australia: politicians lie; garner financial gain from being in office; and allow personal and party gain to have precedence over fair and efficient governance.

These are not merely negative personal opinions, but are facts that are reported in the media frequently, often daily, and are commented on by international press agencies.

Dr. Phelps presents as an intelligent and compassionate person. She is untainted by political allegiances. She articulates the concerns of her community clearly and with passion and with evident honesty. Above all she is independent of the two soiled, debased major political parties.

Dr. Phelps embodies the yearning Australians have for political competence and integrity and humanity. Her personal triumph is also a win for those of us who value moral excellence.

Michael Brooke  
Kyogle

**Keep Cudgen for farmers**

I find it outrageous that the NSW government wants to build a new hospital on state significant farmland in Cudgen.

NSW is in a mega-drought and we are fortunate to be in the 2% of the state that is not in drought. As we head into the Grand Solar Minimum, it is set to get dramatically worse due to additional lunar cycles and new planetary line-ups (Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune). We can look forward to the worst drought in 297 years (see: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=0kcoMDFHbro](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0kcoMDFHbro))!

Food security will be at an absolute premium, so we need that critically important fertile soil for crops like vegetables.

As for the livestock industry suffering from the drought, it's time we looked at the unsustainability of such an industry living in such a vast dry country as this, clearly with a propensity to drought.

Shouldn't we, all of us, be transitioning away from an animal-based diet to a plant-based diet before things get much worse? It takes far more water, power, land and other resources to grow animals than to grow vegetables.

In the meantime, I agree with mayor Milne – keep Cudgen for the farmers and expand on the existing hospital site. Many good reasons for keeping it where it is.

Menkit Prince  
Uki

**Open letter: Kevin Hogan**

It must be incredibly difficult to support a policy position that flies in the face of science. The IPCC is not a 'fake news' body, unlike some of your (sorry, Liberal and National) party ideologues.

The facts are at two levels: First, the evidence is now clearly available that human activities, especially energy generation for power and transport, are significantly impacting negatively on the climate. The release of the latest report from the IPCC is a call to arms on this issue.

The process of science is largely self-checking (unlike ideological opinion) and peer review processes check and double check the facts.

Second, it is good business practice to assess risk, a process which looks first at the potential cost of damage if the prediction of climate change experts come to fruition.

These include the challenges of extreme weather, sea level rise leading to mass migration, health, food production, extinction of species on which we may depend, and many more. And then we multiply that by the probability of that occurring. Risk = Outcome X probability.

Now if you are a climate change denier and think the chances of that happening is pretty low, the predicted damage is so horrifying (call it catastrophic if you like, especially for our children and grandchildren), then even a small probability is much too much, so we have to modify our approach to reduce risk.

Another way of looking at this is that even if the climate change damage is less than we fear, we will have made a cleaner, safer, more sustainable world, not dependent on non-renewable resources. Coal and other fossil fuels and their associated activities (cars, trucks, container ships, agriculture) will be replaced by alternatives that are much more sustainable and healthier.

And the fear expressed by the right wing? Damage to the economy! Believe me, if we ignore climate change, or keep putting it off until it's far too late, the economy won't be worth a damn – and our grandchildren, if they survive the resource and land and food wars, will hate us for our procrastination and stupidity.

Many reports have demonstrated that there is economic benefit for Australia if we grasp the nettle and switch to renewable energy ASAP. We can export technology (we used to be world leaders until government policy drove our research and development overseas) and there are many more and cleaner jobs in renewables than in fossil fuel. And where better to manufacture wind turbines and batteries, etc, than in the now redundant car factories in Adelaide and Melbourne?

The energy sector is most important since we have the technology available to us and it is economic, and the sector is the largest single emitter of carbon dioxide. Once we have shifted that sector, we can focus on the other more complex issues.

One last point – many on the right say we produce a very small proportion of the world's emissions. True, but where are those people's ethics? As one of the wealthiest per capita countries and with a very high, if not the highest, per capita emissions, we have a social responsibility to change quickly. India and China may be bigger emitters in total, but their per capita emission is minute and falling, unlike ours.

And to tickle your economic button, we can export our skills and manufacturing output of solar panels, wind turbines, batteries, etc to these countries – if only our politicians would provide policies to enable and encourage the shift.

Please Kevin – this is urgent and cannot wait.

Richard Swinton  
Clunes  
• edited for length

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**NEXT DEADLINE:**  
**Wednesday 28th November**  
Email [nimbin.goodtimes@gmail.com](mailto:nimbin.goodtimes@gmail.com) or put stuff in our pigeonhole at the Nimbin Community Centre.

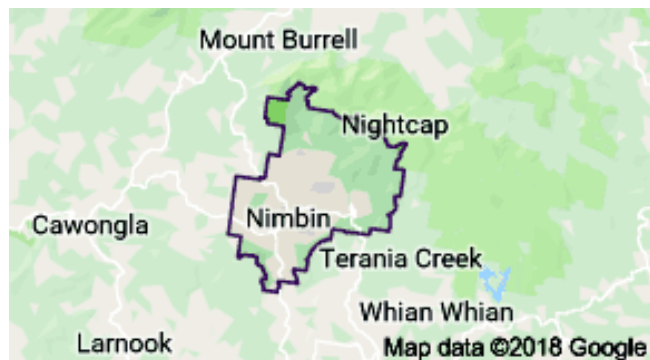
## Protect Nimbin from housing developments

I have been watching the changes in the Nimbin area for nearly 30 years, having been born in the valley in 1958.

The village has become, with its unique buildings and alternative cultural ways, one of the most dynamic yet sustainable centres in Australia. We have here a reputation all over the world of being a must-visit destination, as it should be – it is truly a gem.

It is not for nothing that Nimbin is among one of Australia's leading tourist attractions. The community is warm and caring; our environmental footprint is small; we proudly protect our soil, our water and our earth. It is also a community which can, if motivated, make large organised and very determined mining protests, such as when CSG mining was proposed.

The ABC-TV program *Foreign Correspondent* (11.9.18) is a wake-up call for our region. A large ranch on the Californian Coast was saved from becoming a housing estate by the foresight of a couple of concerned philanthropists who put nature above profits. We are



at the crossroads of a similar situation here in Nimbin.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics in 2016 found the Nimbin Village has less than 500 residents living here. Look it up yourself at: [ABS.com.au](http://ABS.com.au) Nimbin NSW (SSC). The roads, water, sewerage, electricity etc are designed for the purpose of giving quality life for those 480 residents.

Proposed developments of our area, close to the village, will have the probable impact of placing another 1500 plus people in quick time in our local boundary. If you consider that these will have perhaps two dwellings per block, the increased numbers could be higher. Added to the impact of this 'gentrification' of our community would be a gradual

sinking and wasting away of our lifestyle, our tourist attraction and possibly even our standard of living. Another probable result is that land values would also fall, as the cultural uniqueness of the community will decline.

It is very likely the expected increase in our population level will create undesirable issues. In short, the impact of the population will exceed the carrying capacity of our community.

The Hon. Anthony Roberts, the NSW Minister for Planning did reply to me, after I questioned in writing the lack of Local Government foresight. His reply: "It is an issue for the North Coast Planning Department." It is hoped many concerned people can send

letters to the NCPD.

However, minister Roberts did raise an important point, as these developments and others being proposed by Lismore Council are removing valuable agricultural land. This land will be needed for future generations to feed our nation as climate change begins to grind onto the nearly eight billion people occupying the world. Good agricultural land such as ours should be protected by law, restricting its use to purely agricultural.

In order to satisfy the increasing population of Australia, it is clear the traditional-sized block needs rethinking. Communities like Lismore can successfully build medium-rise structures, adequately satisfying the growth of the cities.

Nimbin has an Environment Centre, which has always found itself taking a position of magnitude and character, acting to help save the environment. Surely it could be motivated to do the same to save our community from being swamped with developments.

Mark Pestell  
Nimbin

## Notices

### Annual General Meetings

- Nimbin Community Centre Inc AGM at Birth & Beyond, 5.30pm on Thursday 15th November.
- Nimbin Aquarius Foundation Inc AGM will be held on Monday 19th November, 4.30pm for a 5pm start, at the Green Room at Nimbin Community Centre. New members welcome.
- Nimbin Chamber of Commerce AGM at Birth & Beyond on Wednesday 21st November at 6pm.
- Nim-FM Nimbin Independent Media Inc AGM at 5.30pm on Thursday 22nd November at Nimbin Community Centre Community School Room. All welcome.

### Rock Valley Hall

Annual Christmas BBQ and Twilight Markets will be held on Saturday 24th November, doors open at 5pm. Market stalls, Santa for the kids, lucky wheel with great prizes, dinner (all you can eat) \$15 adults, \$10 teenagers \$5 primary children, soft drinks available for purchase, BYOG. Enquiries Betty 6629-3329 or Patricia 6629-3351.

### Music for a lazy Sunday afternoon

Lismore Greens are holding a benefit for Sue Higginson's campaign for the state seat of Lismore at Clunes Coronation Hall – Walker Street, Clunes. Orkeztar Lismore will be performing, as well as Laura Nobel and her band, Nobel Prize. \$10 per person, children free. Enjoy wine, beer, soft and hot drinks, and nibbles, cakes and soup. Starts at 3.30pm on Sunday 4th November.

### Healing Arts Community Clinic

The Healing Arts Collective members are holding their last Community Clinic Day for 2018 on Monday 5th November, from 11am to 3pm in the Healing Arts Room and the Green Room at Nimbin Community Centre. The therapists are offering half-hour sessions for people who are needing help. They ask for a donation towards their improvement of the space, if you can. Anne, Nicolas and Satya look forward to you joining them there.

### Al-Anon family groups

Is your life being affected by somebody else's drinking? Al-Anon Family Groups can help. Meetings held in your district. For more information: [www.al-anon.org.au](http://www.al-anon.org.au) or phone 1300-252-666.

Serge Benhayon's failed case in the NSW Supreme Court has unveiled Universal Medicine for what it really is – a socially harmful cult that preys on the vulnerable for the benefit of its delusional leader, Serge Benhayon, his family and his inner circle of 'Fourth Degree Initiates'.

Now... "So what?" you might think – he's a nut job and he's got a gaggle of deluded followers. No, it's so much worse than that.

The tentacles of Universal Medicine reach deeply and insidiously into our community. Followers of Mr Benhayon occupy many positions of trust where they deliver government, legal, media, health, child protection, academic and other essential services, and they may not all see their mundane duties and responsibilities as more important than their allegiance to the cult.

Cults like Universal Medicine usually operate inward-focused micro-economies, with members using and supporting each other's services while all channelling money towards the centre, where the leader sits at the apex of a pseudo-spiritual Ponzi scheme.

This cult is all over the place; so deeply has it burrowed under our social skin that Lismore Chamber of Commerce inducted the cult into their Hall of Fame as its very first inductee just this year.



### Revenge of the Loon by Laurie Axtens

Perhaps this is why Southern Cross University recently removed their sponsorship for the Lismore Chamber of Commerce?

The cult has also been active for years and in that time they have been able to infiltrate, through their followers, many organisations responsible for the delivery of justice, government, health, business services and so on.

It's not reds under the beds, it's Benyahon's devotees under the hospital beds, the psych couches and the conference tables.

I gather from reliable sources that Universal Medicine and/or their in-house health and allied health practitioners have in the recent past held contracts to deliver counselling and support services to the staff of some significant local organisations.

I refer you to the Esther Rocket Legal Defense facebook site for your edification – her continued legal battle has cost her dearly and any assistance we can provide her, she has earned.

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# From the mayor's desk



by Cr Isaac Smith

Where did the year go. No question mark... Not really a question. More a statement we make to others seeking a similar reply. We have a need to connect our personal disbelief at what has happened, is happening or will happen to us, with someone else for justification.

We actually do ourselves a disservice when we ask this question. In giving each other the nod and wink to busyness (it is a word, look it up), we succumb to a view that all things which occupy our time are of equal value. When in actual fact, human nature leads us to remember the worst or most time consuming of tasks while our biggest successes take a back seat. In an era where the lack of trust in community, business and government institutions has hit an all time low, your ability to communicate and engage continues to get harder.

So in my role as mayor I have found the challenges of the past few years to be significantly harder than in previous years. I don't want to call it noise, but we all hear it and respond to it in different ways, so it affects us all differently. When I push that noise



Photo: Sue Stock

aside I look back on some wonderful achievements that need to be highlighted, remembered and celebrated.

It is these moments which motivate me to do more in my role to connect and listen to our community, so I hope we have that in common.

As we approach the second anniversary of the 2017 flood it is hard not to marvel at the amazing community response. To this day I have to explain to people that flooding had a major impact on Nimbin and other rural locations.

Flash flooding hit many valleys and creeks and the Nimbin town itself, causing significant damage. But we were equal to the task. A united and motivated community can accomplish much.

Another great moment was the unveiling of the new Aboriginal mural in the

middle of Nimbin (pictured). It was hard not to be moved by this significant event.

To hear and see our local heritage and history told with so much strength and love will sit with me always.

I only wish there was some way this transformative event could be held monthly so others can reconnect with our history. Cultural awareness is a must in our current climate of fear and Facebook echo chambers.

I was also very pleased with councils change to procurement policy in fighting against the Adani mine. In the end we are a large organisation that can use our purchasing power to influence a bigger agenda.

The environmental crimes that would be committed against the Barrier Reef and parts of North Queensland would be devastating. So I believe our community

is right behind us in adding our voice to stopping this controversial fossil fuel project.

Seeing the first steps to properly maintaining the Nimbin pool into the future is a big tick in my view. It is a good sign that council is heading in the right direction with our assets.

I have lost count of the little things that have added to this view as I look back on the discussions with locals about the roads, green space, culverts, bridges, footpaths, gardens, car parks and more around Nimbin.

But all these little things matter. They make up the smaller moments we so easily forget when we get into busyness mode. When you look back on your year, how many amazing moments are you glossing over? Find one and tell somebody. Good news is worth sharing!

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by Cr Danielle Mulholland, mayor

The past month started with a bang with a drought fundraising event at the Kyogle Bowling Club which was very successful. The service clubs of Kyogle came together to host a range of activities and stalls.

On Sunday 23rd September, I was on hand to meet Trevor Wilson of Dyraaba, at the end of a long walk from Casino to the Kyogle Visitor Information Centre to raise awareness around cancer, the work of the Cancer Council, and next year's Casino Relay for Life.

Congratulations to Trevor and Richmond Valley Mayor Robert

## Kyogle Council notebook

Mustow, who also completed the walk. The fun part was when they challenged me to form a Kyogle team to join next year's Relay for Life which will be held on 6th and 7th April.

If you're interested in being part of the challenge, please don't hesitate to give me a call or even send me an email with your contact details.

A huge congratulations to Mick McCormack who was recently acknowledged at the regional policing awards. Mick has been one of Kyogle's local police officers for 27 years, with 30 years in policing overall.

The Northern Rivers Joint Organisation (JO) met again to workshop its regional priorities and future direction. The NRJO will be launching a statement of regional priorities very soon, so stay tuned.

The new Supercheap Auto TV advertisement, filmed in Kyogle in August, screened over Bathurst weekend, promoting our beautiful region and showcasing what we have to offer.

Many thanks to Reece Moger and his family from Bonalbo, as this is where the seed for filming the ad in the Kyogle

Local Government Area was planted.

Kyogle Council negotiated a promotional video compiled by the ad's organisers which we will launch soon. Another stay-tuned moment.

The Kyogle Show was held on the weekend of 6th October and was a very successful event. Federal Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources David Littleproud opened the show, with Member for Lismore Thomas George and Member for Page Kevin Hogan in attendance.

An enormous amount of work goes into the organisation of a show, so I'd like to congratulate the Show Committee on a well-run event.

Ashleigh Little is this year's new showgirl with Kristin Wimble runner up. Congratulations to both Ashleigh and Kristin! I look forward to working with Ashleigh over the next 12 months and helping her make the most of any opportunities that come her way.

I will be starting up the Mayoral outreach meetings again in the New Year, so if you're interested in having a chat and a bit of a catch up, please contact Council on 6632-1611 or email: council@kyogle.nsw.gov.au



## The Cities Power Partnership

I've had a busy time through October with the highlight being the Cities Power Partnership (CPP) Summit which was held in Kiama on the South Coast. The Cities Power Partnership is a network of more than 100 Councils across Australia, collectively representing more than 11 million people, working towards emissions reduction targets, leading the way with innovative renewable energy projects, and exploring sustainable transport solutions for our rapidly changing society.

With the recent release of the IPCC report outlining the seriously scary impacts of Climate Change at 1.5 degrees there really is absolutely no time to waste to take serious action across our whole society. Councils are sizeable organisations that generate significant levels of emissions and we can also work alongside community groups, residents and businesses to support collective community effort.

The CPP organisers estimate that if we can transform the way that cities use and generate energy we have the potential to deliver 70% of the total emissions reductions that are needed to stay on track for the two-degrees limit set under the Paris Agreement. Our local governments are a critical part of the climate solution.

Lismore City Council won the Community Engagement Award for our Lismore Community Solar Farms. You have most likely heard about our 99kW floating solar farm that is at the East Lismore Sewage Treatment Plant, and the same project funded another 99kW array on GSAC. The funding model that we used was innovative in that Council partnered with the community to build them. They are Council owned, and community funded, with the money being repaid to community investors at a rate of return better than if they invested it in the bank.

As well as being rewarded for our work, I heard about a number of other inspiring projects happening around the country. I heard about partnerships to support schools to put solar on their roofs, about city councils investing in renewable projects in the regions, and about infrastructure requirements that will need to be addressed nationally to allow for increasing numbers of electric vehicles.

I also heard about the inspiring work being done in the ACT as they move towards 100%

### Word of the Bird

by Cr Elly Bird

renewables, including shifting all of their government vehicles to electric vehicles (EVs), and we heard the story of Lancaster, California where all new houses must meet zero net emission standards and the city is 100% renewable. It was an inspiring few days that really emphasised to me the need for action.

With around \$266 billion in infrastructure and homes at risk from coastal inundation and flooding at sea level rise of just 1.1m, and with millions of people's lives likely to be lost to climate change, as the Mayor of Lancaster said in his speech, "When you have serious problems, you take serious action. Quickly." In the current vacuum of meaningful political action in Australia, local government can play a much-needed leadership role.

I have also just been at the Local Government NSW Conference. There are two key things to let you know from that conference that impact on local government and on our community. The first is that the current Federal Liberal National Government has until very recently had a freeze on the Federal assistance grants that are provided to councils. Because of this freeze, the funding provided to councils is currently less than 0.5% of commonwealth revenue, and levels are less than they were in 1996.

This has significantly impacted regional councils. We need that funding to be returned to at least 1% or greater and we need a greater investment from Federal government into our local infrastructure.

The other outrageous situation we are grappling with is that NSW Government currently collects millions of dollars from a waste levy that they aren't returning to local government to help address the recycling crisis. Last year the NSW Government collected \$727 million from industry, business and local government, and Councils alone pay around \$300 million in waste levies every year. Only around 18% of that is reinvested by the NSW Government in recycling and waste management, with the rest disappearing into government coffers. We need a 100% reinvestment of that levy into waste and recycling.

I can be contacted for council or community business at: [elly.bird@lismore.nsw.gov.au](mailto:elly.bird@lismore.nsw.gov.au) or on 0418-639-927.



Page MP Kevin Hogan with Norco's acting CEO Greg McNamara and Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack

by Kevin Hogan MP,  
Member for Page

The 850 jobs at Norco and the sustainability of its 220 farm members are more assured. I recently announced a \$30 million expansion of Norco's ice-cream facility in Lismore.

Norco came to me with plans to double the production at their ice-cream factory. This is to ensure job security and expand its workplace, including employing more apprentices.

It also wanted to help its 220 member farms become more sustainable.

I worked with them and obtained a \$15 million grant to match their investment so Norco could go ahead with its plans.

The doubling of production means the milk price paid to Norco's 220 member farms will increase.

The announcement was an exciting day for Norco and our region.

The Federal Parliament has apologised to the victims and survivors of institutional childhood sexual abuse.

It was very moving, a lot of emotion in the chamber. The stories that have been told to the Royal Commission and elsewhere have

been heartbreaking.

The apology, while not erasing the past will, for some I hope, heal some of the hurt.

We have many great Indigenous artists in our community.

Not only is it important for them to develop their artistic skills, they also need to develop other skills like marketing so they can sell their work and earn a living.

I announced almost \$46,000 as a grant for Arts Northern Rivers to help them with this.

It will culminate in a large Indigenous Art Market in Lismore next year.

## Turning the Page on preschool education

by Patrick Deegan  
ALP Candidate for Page

If there's one thing I've learned, it's that a wise person never stops learning.

Education is the key to so much in life. In fact, I believe investing in education is the most important responsibility of government.

There is plenty of evidence to show that is important to start our education journey early. Last year the report of the *Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools through Early Childhood Interventions* found that "children who participate in high quality early childhood education are more likely to complete year 12 and are less likely to repeat grades or require additional support."

In other words, getting kids into learning habits from a young age benefits them, benefits the community, and delivers an outstanding return on investment. It's the ultimate win-win scenario.

Sadly, however, Australia is lagging behind when it comes to Early Childhood Education. Only 15% of Australian three year olds attend preschool, and only 57% of three year olds currently attend some form of early education, including long day care services.

Compare that to New Zealand where 95% of children under five are engaged in Early Childhood Education, usually for 20-22 hours a week. For three and four year olds, the first 20 hours are fully funded by the New Zealand Government

Australia can – and should – do much better. That is why I am so



proud of Labor's early education policy.

Last month Opposition Leader Bill Shorten announced that a Labor Government would ensure every three and four-year old has access to 15 hours of age-appropriate preschool a week, totalling 600 hours in a year, so they can make the best possible transition to school.

Labor's vision is for two years of quality, universal preschool, with qualified early educators, for every Australian child and every Australian family, regardless of the wealth of the parents.

We have many wonderful early learning facilities in the Northern Rivers, staffed by truly incredible and inspiring educators. Labor's policy will ensure all local kids get the opportunity to participate in these programs to learn from a young age.

### Campaign Launch

On a personal note, the official launch of my campaign for Page took place last month, and I was delighted to see so many people come along and show their support.

It was great to have Anthony

Albanese MP drop in to talk about the importance of the next Federal election, and how the contest for Page could determine the future of the country.

At the launch, I talked about my own journey as a kid growing up in the Northern Rivers, and how my experiences as a social welfare professional have shaped my outlook on life and politics.

Front-line social services can be a challenging and even traumatic place to work. I've seen people at their best and their worst. I've seen resilience, fear, strength, love and pain.

But I've also seen the power of education to lift people out of poverty, and the power of hope to lift people out of despair. Most importantly, I've seen common humanity that binds us together as people – no matter what you look like, or who you vote for.

We not only live in a wonderful place, we are all part of a wonderful community, and we deserve a strong voice in Federal Parliament.

You can see a video my speech to the campaign launch on my Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/patrick4page](http://www.facebook.com/patrick4page)