

Administrators' Message



With the 'Ring of Steel' that separated regional and metropolitan Victoria being lifted, we knew that it was going to be an interesting time for our businesses here in the South Gippsland. Although there was some anxiety in the lead up, it seems our businesses have coped well with the influx of tourists re-entering the region. For that effort, we would love to say a huge thank-you to you all for making all our visitors feel welcome.

We have seen many businesses successfully adapt to the COVID-19 requirements. During lockdown, a number of hospitality businesses took the opportunity to renovate and improve their outdoor dining experience. At Council, we have received 20 enquiries from businesses thus far wanting to extend their outdoor dining space, which is encouraging for locals and visitors to our region.

Our region's businesses have also been getting featured across a broad range of publications. Meeniyan, for example, has been in an article by Good Food. It is great to see our region getting some admiration for the work everyone has done to improve our offerings.

We have also seen our community rally to support our local businesses and growers. At Council we always believe that we should shop local where possible, but COVID-19 has really brought this to the front of everyone's minds.

While business survival has been the talk of the town during the lockdown period, we must also take a moment to consider our tourism sector. Between the bushfire season earlier this year and COVID-19, tourism in our region, and Australia more broadly, has been tough on those who provide accommodation and experiences. It is magnificent to see providers getting back into the swing of things ready for the summer holidays. We also welcome the support coming from the Victorian Government in the form of 120,000 \$200 tourism vouchers which will entice more people to visit and stay in regional Victoria.

We also have libraries opening again on Saturdays, which will be great to see.

Although, we cannot mention this year without touching on mental health and wellbeing. With many losing their jobs or being off work for a significant amount of time, it can take its toll on your mental health. Hopefully with things opening up further, this strain will begin to subside. However, if you or anyone you know is suffering, please reach out to a mental health professional or call one of the free services such as Beyond Blue.

This week, there was also an announcement from the State Government that funding would be provided to South Gippsland's iconic Wilsons Promontory. This will be used to turn Wilsons Promontory into a biodiversity sanctuary and upgrade its visitor precinct to include a new information centre, tourism hub, environmentally sustainable accommodation, and a new park and ride service to reduce peak season congestion. We are excited to see what this does for Wilsons Promontory and our region.

Significant investments such as this allow our region to continue to draw visitors to us. We have so many unique experiences to offer here in South Gippsland and we believe that is what makes us a great place to explore and live.

Julie Eisenbise, Christian Zahra AM and Rick Brown – Administrators