

# Administrators' Message



Last week, we had the final Council Meeting for the year in which we made decisions on a number of topics of community interest.

We endorsed spending South Gippsland Shire Council's \$2,376,032 Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program allocation to upgrade every streetlight in the Shire and to improve the Port Welshpool boat ramp carpark.

Streetlights currently account for approximately 60 per cent of Council's overall energy budget, costing over \$300,000 annually. Upgrading all streetlights in the Shire should reduce this expense by around 50 per cent, saving up to \$155,000 per annum. In addition to the financial savings this project will result in an emission reduction of approximately 300 tonnes per annum.

Port Welshpool is a very popular destination for boaters and fishers from right across Gippsland and the south-eastern suburbs, so it will be great to improve the facilities that they use. We will seal the existing unsealed car park and add kerb and channelling. The project will also include the development of additional car parking with approximately 35 more spaces provided for both cars and boat trailers along with upgraded lighting.

We noted that three quarters of our COVID-19 Community Support Package has been supporting a range of South Gippsland community groups and businesses. Most recently we have provided \$126,000 to support 22 Recreation Reserve committees, waived fees for Business Registrations and Permits for 2020 and 2021 for 710 local businesses, printed and distributed 5,000 updated Community Information Brochures, and allocated a further \$30,000 in grants to assist home-based businesses.

Businesses have also been supported this year through the work we have been doing with the Victorian Small Business Commission. In its recent newsletter the Commission made note of South Gippsland Shire Council's efforts to work with the local businesses:

*What does 'being small business friendly' look like in practice? A shining example is South Gippsland Shire Council... To revitalise Leongatha's main street, the council undertook a major capital works project that included improving footpaths, moving overhead powerlines underground, replacing water mains and introducing new energy efficient street lighting.*

*Guided by the VSBC's Victorian small business engagement guidelines, the council created the Bair Street Reference Group. The result? Clear, frequent and two-way communication between the council and affected small businesses about ways to mitigate disruption throughout each and every stage of the project...*

*The council has also explored opportunities to develop new business resources. They recently launched Open in Your Area – a handy A-Z of South Gippsland's businesses that includes*

*changes to how they're operating during the pandemic.*

It's really heartening to receive this sort of recognition from the Commission – it shows that we're on the right track in how we support our community and local businesses.

In other news, this week we heard that Emma Germano was made President of the Victorian Farmers Federation. Ms Germano is a Mirboo North resident who runs the well-known I Love Farms farm and shop on the Strzelecki Highway towards Morwell. We wish to congratulate Ms Germano on her appointment and wish her all the best in her new role.

Speaking of Mirboo North, the community spirit was palpable in town as residents got together for a working bee just in time for Christmas. Locals got to work cleaning up the town in preparation for the Christmas break, which was fantastic to see. Community spirit has always been an asset in Mirboo North, and this year it has been all the more important. Thank you all for getting out and about and doing your bit to keep our towns beautiful for everyone to enjoy.

As we all move around more over the Christmas and New Year period, we encourage you all to support small, local businesses where possible. As part of that, please ensure you take note of the COVID-19 check-in processes. QR codes and physical sign-in sheets will likely be present in all shops, so please make sure you fill out your details for contact tracing purposes.

This will be the last Administrator's Message for a few weeks due to the Christmas break. We wish you all a safe and Merry Christmas and a happier and less disrupted 2021.

Finally, it would be fitting to end this message the same way we opened the Council Meeting – with a round of applause for every single person who has contributed in their own way to making this year the best it could be, despite the trying circumstances. We made particular note of the efforts of parents, frontline health workers, volunteers and local business people and associations. The inherent qualities of the South Gippsland communities really came to the fore in 2020.

**Julie Eisenbise, Christian Zahra AM and Rick Brown – Administrators**