

Annual report for 2020-21

Business Northwest had another highly successful year albeit COVID dominated. A very difficult year for our members, their staff and the general public. Fortunately, local business came through it relatively well but now face a lot of uncertainty as major states re-enter lockdown mode. We provided support to our members through the height of the pandemic, giving guidance and information to help them get access to subsidies and grant funds; and sometimes just a bit of moral support.

Governments, both federal and state responded well during the year with the federal JobKeeper and JobSeeker programs ably supported by state government; unfortunately now more support is needed as extended lockdowns in mainland states are affecting our tourism and hospitality sectors and will also impact critical supply chains as manufacturing slows down in NSW and Victoria.

Tasmania made it through another election and several months later status quo has been resumed, with Peter Gutwein as Premier and Rebecca White as Opposition leader. Congratulations to Anita Dow for her elevation to Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

Our *Helping Burnie Work* project was completed, and I am pleased to say we made a difference to many of the long-term unemployed folk that came through the course over a two-year COVID interrupted period. It is great to walk around the city and see some of them working in local businesses. We will be trying to repeat this training program via fresh grant funds later this year and will be engaging local businesses to provide work experience and possible internships.

Our close relationship with Burnie City Council has seen several good projects come to fruition. At short notice we equipped the Norfolk Pine tree in Mount Street with programmable LED lights in time for the Christmas period. It was a spectacular show, and we will be doing more shows in coming months plus plan to hold a major event centred around the tree in December - hopefully the forerunner of an annual event that the entire city looks forward to.

In November we launched *Burnie 2.0* – a plan to reinvigorate Burnie. We started work on several programs including *Renew Burnie* (affiliated with *Renew Australia*) which focused on placing social enterprises into vacant shops in the Plaza and City Square arcades in our CBD. We now have filled up most of the vacant shops and have breathed life back into those empty spaces. The *Burnie Innovation Hub* was launched as a venue for start-ups and co-working and has attracted a small but productive bunch of entrepreneurs. It is likely to morph into the north west division of *Enterprise* (via \$500K of state government election funding) and relocate; but we can take pride that we “got the ball rolling” on a local start-up ecosystem.

Via *Renew Burnie* we established our own headquarters in the middle of the Plaza Arcade - this has been fantastic for our profile and many members drop in and have a chat on a regular basis. My goal of bringing art and history into the middle of the city has been successful and we have hosted the exhibiting of several pieces from the *Paper on Skin* exhibition in our pop-up office.

The Plaza Arcade became a real focal point and Cyndia and Debbie King created a memorable Christmas event for local children. It included “Santa’s grotto” plus his workshop where they could play for a while as parents went out to buy presents. There were queues all the way down the arcade and out into Wilson St to visit Santa; as we were the only local venue he was appearing at last Christmas. It was a really “feel good” project and had plenty of news coverage.

Our *Living History Walk* became party of the *Ten Days on the Island* festival and featured great work by Cyndia Hilliger to assemble historic photos and footage into ten video vignettes accessible by scanning appropriately located QR codes around the city. It was a popular attraction during the festival and flowed on from our pop-up cinema in the Plaza Arcade where we showed historic footage of Burnie and the NW coast mainly from the 50s and 60s, leaving some viewers in tears as memories flowed back. Very well received - Cyndia's free popcorn helped!

Our plan to make Burnie a more attractive place to live and visit spawned the introduction of platypus cam into the Rhododendron Gardens. Facilitated by a state government grant of \$19,000 (via our friends at *West by North West*) we are now beaming our platypuses to the world via our YouTube channel. Management at EVRG is very pleased and we hope it increases the public profile of the gardens and drives attendance up. Work has started on doing the same for our fairy penguins at West Park. Well done Justin McErlain for doing so much great work on these projects.

Breakfast Networking Sessions continue to be very popular averaging 23 people in attendance and this program is often lauded by chambers in other locations. Not only are these popular for the information we get from our presenters, but I know a lot of business is done through the networking process. Our sincere thanks to Nigel Morgan and his family/staff at Wellers Inn for their continued support of this program; plus thanks to the our hard core regulars who regularly attend these events. Livestreaming of these events is another great step forward and demonstrates our initiative and leadership. Many thanks to Michael Cannon and Justin for their continued support in delivering these breakfasts.

Burnie City Council made a number of cost cutting decisions in May that have had a dramatic effect on the local arts community. The redevelopment of the BAFC is an exciting plan and we will be working with Simon Overland and his team to make sure the change of business model in terms of event delivery is successful. We enjoy a special relationship with our Council and firmly believe that we must work together to grow the economy of the city and make it a better place of residents and visitors. BNW has also fostered a stronger relationship with the local arts community and plan to strengthen that in coming months to help minimise the impact of the temporary closure of the gallery. Our display of indigenous art by local elder Alan Radford for last year's NAIDOC week was warmly received and certainly helped to make Plaza Arcade more attractive.

We have considerably enhanced our profile as being the most active and high-profile business group in the region. Appearances on national radio and TV – *7:30 Report* and *The Drum*, comments in *The Advocate* and *The Examiner*, plus occasional interviews with Leon Compton and fortnightly interviews with Leigh Kenworthy on 7BU have increased our exposure considerably and is often commented upon by business and political leaders. We are frequently the only business organisation at many seminars and government announcements in the region plus had direct input to the PESRAC report.

I was a regular attendee at the Chamber Alliance meetings during the year. These mostly occurred via Zoom and we were often meeting with then Minister for Small Business Sarah Courtney – it was great to have direct access to the Minister deep in the pandemic to give her details of local issues.

Financially we enjoyed a positive year and were able to take advantage of several government grants to provide programs for training, business awareness and tourism initiatives whilst conserving expenditure and increasing our funds invested. I thank our Executive team; Justin, Kial, Bec, Michael and Nick plus Cyndia for their continued support and am proud of what we have achieved.

The merger of the Burnie Tourism Association into ours was completed and took our overall membership to around 100.

On the social side, the dinner at Wellers Inn for the annual State Budget Review featuring Premier Gutwein was attend by 70 guests and was a great evening. Catered for by Matt Fraser with table service from local hospitality students it was an outstanding success.

I thought the Premier’s dinner would be the highlight of our social year but the lunch with Treasurer Josh Frydenberg overshadowed it – especially when the Prime Minister, Scott Morrison was the “surprise guest”! Both the PM, Treasurer and local MP Gavin Pearce enjoyed the event and made time to chat with RSL veterans, staff, hospitality students and some of the 90 guests that attended. The PM later commented that the room had the most positivity he had experienced in his travels around the nation at that time.

Thanks to our sponsors who supported us during the year - their support enables us to act with confidence when investing in activities to drive economic growth in the region.

I look forward to another positive year and wish all our members the best for what will be another challenging period. We are here to assist in whatever means we can - our network is very strong, and we have amazing capabilities within our Executive team and the general membership. I am always heartened at the extent our members will rally to help each other; it is an endearing trait of “us coasters”.

I wish the incoming Executive all the best for another prosperous year.



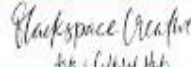
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