



ADAM MARSHALL

The announcement that the Member for Northern Tablelands, Adam Marshall, will call it a day for politics on 13 May came out of the blue and was not expected. Spending half of his life in politics starting as a Councillor for Gunnedah and then Mayor through to Minister for Agriculture in the previous Coalition Government I believe Adam always fought hard for his constituents. With Walcha returning to his electorate over a year ago Adam was always easy to contact and continued to advocate for any request we had.

A regular visitor to our community over the last couple of years he was willing to meet anyone who needed his assistance. At his press conference in Inverell, Adam noted that a large percentage of these request didn't always require a political answer but were still important to him. He leaves big shoes to fill over a large electorate that runs from Nowendoc to Boomi and the next member will need to love motels and travelling. I am sure there will be much more said over the next six weeks but personally I would like to thank Adam for not only his interest and advocacy for our community but his friendship and support along the way.

BUDGET TIME

Around this time each year councils, like many other businesses, start the process of setting the budget for the ensuing year. This ends up being a detailed and complicated document, covering depreciation of assets, statutory costs, projected income from operations and grants along a myriad of dissections. While a large part of these budget papers are consumed with necessary costs there are still many funding decisions that the Councillors and the community can have an input into. Armed with a draft budget senior staff and Councillors will once again hit the road for our yearly community catch-up. While the dates for this have not been set it will occur in the middle of May and give everyone an opportunity to ask questions and provide valuable feedback which will inform the final adopted budget. With our successful Special Rate Variation last year starting to hit, it's important that we present this budget and explain where your rates are spent.

It is difficult to find a time for each venue that suits everyone but a couple of hours spent informing the path your Council takes may well be worth it.

RIVERVIEW AGED CARE

It is now four months since the public meeting at the Bowling Club where you gave overwhelming support for Walcha Council to be the service provider for Riverview. By now I thought we would be further along the path, but that path is proving to be more complicated than we envisaged. While tight, we believe we can manage the financial side of the operation, it still stacks up, and while the clinical and care side are closely governed



they can be fulfilled with expert assistance, much of which exists there already. Staffing of any facility, especially medical facilities, is difficult in these times but while that is a day-to-day issue we believe it can be covered. While Council is working through the details of transfer with Presbyterian Aged Care, we may yet reach an impasse should they resolve to require Council to pay for the facility infrastructure or otherwise present Council with unworkable conditions of operation. Council are here on behalf of the community to, if we can, provide an alternative option to the facility closing from lack of other interested parties, but we are not in the position to 'purchase' a business and we must be mindful of the risk and liability we are taking on. The basic problem is that with the aged care sector's financial sustainability issues Council cannot take on a large debt and operate a facility that will likely only break even in the best case scenario. It's worth highlighting the fact that Riverview was originally a community-built facility and there was no compensation for when it was first removed from community ownership.

OFF CREEK STORAGE

While the completion date for the pumping station works are slipping the budget remains on track. Temporary pumping was recently reinstated to maintain our town storage at a safe level and with cooler weather coming there should be no problem between now and when the remaining pumping station works are finished. For whatever reason, over the last couple of months I have constantly been asked "is the dam leaking?" This has included calls from politicians and the media. The simple answer is "yes". There are small wet patches appearing behind the wall and I would imagine infiltration into the subsoil that we will never see. If you ask any dam engineer they will tell you all earth-filled dams leak and ours is no exception. No soil is impervious to seepage and as pressure increases so does this seepage. The dam is not just a pile of dirt, it is deliberately designed with an engineered core in the middle over concrete 'key'. Any water that does make its way through is directed to a flume at the base so Council staff can measure any changes over time and as the dam fills. The strange thing to me is that for all the work that went into pleading a case for funding and the convoluted process to build the storage the focus of Facebook and gossip is a negative. As Adam Marshall said this is the first public dam to be built in NSW in 25 years, let's celebrate the outcome.

Clr Eric Noakes
Mayor of Walcha