

Electorate News

incorporating Gunnedah,
Liverpool Plains and Walcha Shires
plus Tamworth Regional Council

A Newsletter from **PETER DRAPER MP**
Independent Member for Tamworth

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13 FITZROY STREET - PO BOX 1740 TAMWORTH NSW 2340 • PHONE: (02) 6766 1422 • FAX: (02) 6766 6765 • EMAIL: tamworth@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Smooth transition to new boundaries

After the next State election in March 2007 the Tamworth electorate will be expanded to include the communities of Barraba, Breeza, Boggabri, Manilla, Mullaley and Tambar Springs. Walcha will move into the Northern Tablelands electorate.

These changes were flagged in August when communities were invited to make their submissions. Late last year I made a submission based on the community of interest many of these local centres share with Tamworth.

Councils including the previous Manilla Shire have given their support and I have already made representations for groups in Mullaley and Boggabri.

I'm really pleased by what has been a smooth transition and will be getting out into the communities to canvas issues through a series of public meetings. ■

Minister inspects Centre upgrade



During his visit to the region NSW Justice Minister John Hatzistergos with Peter Draper MP and Tamworth Correctional Centre Governor Superintendent Doug Stanford inspected improvements resulting from a \$891,000 upgrade. The project included a new industries block, visiting section, clinic facility, minimum security units, a periodic detention centre and electricity supply. Photo Courtesy: Northern Daily Leader. ■

Victory for cleaners and local jobs saved



Australian Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union organiser Carmel Cook rallies the crowd before asking Peter Draper MP to raise the concerns over changes to Government cleaning contracts in the NSW Parliament.

It was a clear victory for the cleaners of schools, TAFEs and government offices in the Tamworth region to retain their job security, working hours and conditions.

In August the prospects looked grim when 80 cleaners affected by Government plans to renegotiate their contracts converged on my office seeking help to fight this restructure.

The proposed changes would have resulted in a massive loss of local jobs, reduction in working hours and a lowering of cleaning standards. There were even ridiculous suggestions that parents, students and workers might have to fill the gaps.

For the first time in 11 years the union was forced to act on behalf of cleaners to hold rallies and call a strike to draw attention to this ill considered proposal.

I raised the issue in Parliament, asking the Minister whether he was aware that it

was almost impossible for cleaners to achieve a reasonable cleaning standard within the existing hours and staff numbers. To cut the hours and level of service was not good policy and would place undue pressure on cleaning staff. It also created occupational health and safety problems.

After extensive negotiations, the Government finally listened to the cleaners' concerns and has given guarantees of employment and assurances of no reductions in current weekly hours and cleaning standards. ■

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Second stage upgrade needed for Gunnedah Police Station

I am pleased to see the Gunnedah Police Station identified as a top priority for refurbishment in the NSW Police Department's current master plan.

Although there has been considerable improvement to conditions through a \$400,000 injection to upgrade the custody management area, further work is urgently needed to bring the station to a reasonable standard.

A brand new police station for the Gunnedah community would have been ideal, however, the visit of Police Minister John Watkins to inspect the facilities in September is a good sign the Government is giving serious consideration to funding the second stage of improvements.

This would include an upgrade of the customer service area, amenities and interview rooms. The Gunnedah police

officers were able to put a good case to the Minister for this work to proceed and I am continuing to press the Government to provide this funding in the next State budget. ■



Peter Draper MP with Gunnedah Shire Council mayor Gae Swain and the NSW Police Minister John Watkins during his visit to the Gunnedah Police Station.

Equine centre will be a great resource for the region

Planning is underway for Tamworth's Australian Equine and Livestock Centre, a project which has been a community priority for many years.

The long wait for funding ended when the Federal Government made its commitment of \$6M to the facility to add to the State's early injection of \$3.35M.

This will be an excellent resource for the region's vibrant livestock and equine industries and will enable its members to

stage major events such as the National Cutting Horse Association Futurity, the Quarter Horse Nationals and the ABCRA rodeo and campdraft finals.

It will put Tamworth on the map as a centre for staging major equestrian events and the credit for this successful outcome must go to the many people who have worked so hard to keep the vision alive despite the disappointments and lengthy wait for full funding. ■

Club wins respite from summer heat

A State Government grant of \$20,000 has made a big difference to the facilities for members of the North Tamworth Bowling Club and the local community.

The funding has been used to provide a much needed shade cover for the outdoor recreation area which was completed earlier this year.

Given the summer heat in Tamworth it will extend the use of the barbecue area built 18 months ago with a capacity to seat 50 people. It is a popular venue for community organisations and club members to stage events and for social occasions.

I was pleased to work with the club to achieve this funding as a one-off grant from the NSW Premier's Department which was impressed with the strong record of support the club provides to the community. ■



Launch of the North Tamworth Bowling Club's new undercover barbecue area. From left: Club Senior Vice President Ted Trainor, Peter Draper MP, Club President Des Allen and Club Director Brian Sykes.



From left: Parliamentary Secretary to the NSW Dept of Energy & Utilities Graham West, Peter Draper MP, Chaffey Dam Upgrade Community Reference Panel Chair Phil Betts with Dungowan School captains Danica Little and Jaye Sippel and Woolomin School captain Tamara Beard.

Safety upgrade for Chaffey Dam

The \$788,000 safety upgrade of Chaffey Dam has guaranteed five years of added protection to Tamworth and the communities down valley in times of extreme floods.

The work was finished on budget and in time thanks to the dedication of the local team which included State Water, Tamworth Regional Council and the Community Reference Panel.

A further \$0.9 million has been set aside in this year's State budget to carry out hydrological, engineering, environmental, economic and operation surveys. These investigations will assess the need for increasing the capacity of Chaffey Dam to ensure future reliability of supply to the Peel Valley into the future and for sustainable environmental management. ■



President of the Nundle Public School P & C Lyn Ryan; Peter Draper MP; the Shadow Minister for Education & Training Jillian Skinner; Administration Manager of Gilgai Public School Sue Lowe and Richard Torbay MP.

Struggle continues for school staffing formula review

Small school communities in country areas are still waiting for the review into the unpopular staffing formula as promised by the State Government two years ago.

We are nearing the end of another year and many of these schools face the trauma of losing teachers and resources if they fall below the magic number set by the Department of Education when term starts next year.

I recently organised a meeting in Uralla between P&C representatives from a number of small schools in the Tamworth and Northern Tablelands regions with the Shadow Minister for Education Jillian Skinner.

The group once again pressed for a review and some flexibility in the system to take account of student numbers as they fluctuate throughout the year in small schools. To lose one teacher because a school is short one student is unfair and places a burden on remaining staff, the students and the school communities.

MP Richard Torbay first raised this issue in Parliament in 2002 and as a result the review was promised, however, a change of minister after the 2003 election took it off the agenda where it has remained. I will continue to fight hard to see this review undertaken and a much fairer system put in place. ■

\$5million boost for Agricultural Institute

The proposal to invest \$5 million in the Tamworth Agricultural Institute as part of yet another government restructure is welcome news. It depends on the success of a sale of assets owned by the Department of Primary Industries across the State which is expected to yield approximately \$25 million.

Through this injection of funds the Department plans to develop new soil and plant processing facilities, new diagnostic and biotechnology laboratories, glasshouses and storage sheds. ■



Peter Draper MP inspects a muffler manufactured on site at Ride! Motorcycles in Tamworth thanks to State Government assistance with the business' owner Garry MacDonald and NSW Minister for Regional Development David Campbell. ■

Further Funding

- ✓ \$2,336,888 - new equipment Tamworth Rural Fire Service (RFS); \$390,577 Walcha RFS; \$534,732 Gunnedah RFS
- ✓ \$905,000 - road and bridge upgrade near Nundle
- ✓ \$300,000 - Topdale Rd sealing
- ✓ \$293,350 - maintenance projects for 13 local public schools.
- ✓ \$143,479 - new bus for Gunnedah HACC Service
- ✓ \$20,000 - new SES vehicle Tamworth/Parry ; \$11,000 - new SES vehicle, Tamworth /Manilla.
- ✓ \$12,500 - economic projects Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah Shire Councils
- ✓ \$3,600 - Tamworth student to attend Global Young Leaders Conference in US
- ✓ \$1,600 - RSL Tamworth, Battle for Australia commemoration

Safeguards for timber industry

Constant restructures and privatisation threats are a concern for the long term future of the softwood timber industries in the Walcha and Nundle areas.

A \$50 million Forests NSW contract to cut and cart plantation pine timber recently awarded to Walcha company Brian Smith Timber Transport has given great confidence to the local industry.

Walcha Shire Council has been taking a proactive role in working towards long term sustainability through its Softwood Plantation Development Strategy which could see plantations increase from 13,000ha to 50,000ha in future years.

The Council is keen to see issues addressed such as local employment, rates, road maintenance, bushfire protection, local knowledge, salinity and access before privatisation is considered.

I will continue to work closely with the community to ensure the Government puts these safeguards in place. ■

Recent good rain, the rise in real estate and country property prices and planning for several important projects is creating buoyancy and optimism in our region.

As the Christmas season approaches we have much to celebrate with the long awaited announcement that the Australian Equine and Livestock Centre in Tamworth can now go ahead. The Federal Government contribution to match State and industry funding will deliver a multi million project that has the potential to reinvent the district's claim to fame. The contribution from the equine and livestock industries to the region's economy in the staging of events in this spectacular complex will complement that of our other great iconic event in Tamworth, the Telstra Country Music Festival.

The future of rural research also looks promising with the NSW Department of Primary Industries plan to undertake a \$5million expansion of the Tamworth Agricultural Institute at Calala. This was a positive outcome of a contentious restructure.

The securing of a new \$9.8million hospital (MPS) for Walcha by 2006 has given the community renewed optimism in health service delivery. The economy also benefited from State Government support to business and manufacturing including the expansion of small business magazine Regional Business North West, Gunnedah's Eco Carbons; Tamworth's Blue Stripe Meats and Ride! Motorcycles.

The positives were tempered by uncertainty over job losses and clinical service levels in the New England Area Health Service merger with Hunter Health, cuts to disability services, the takeover of the state rail network, a threat to cleaners work hours and conditions and the centralisation of business enterprise centres.

As your state representative I have lobbied strenuously on your behalf for the best possible outcome on these issues. There is much I would like to achieve for the electorate in the coming 12 months. I look forward to working with the new Tamworth Regional Council alongside the councils of Gunnedah, Walcha and Liverpool Plains to identify what matters and deliver the results. I wish each of you a safe and happy Christmas and alongside new challenges I trust the New Year will bring peace and prosperity to our community.

Peter Draper

Funding boosts local home ownership but more needed

The Tamworth and District Co-Operative Housing Society provides a vital service to people on low to moderate incomes seeking home loans but more funding is needed to ensure it can continue meeting the high demand of eligible lenders.

A \$2 million funding boost I secured on behalf of the society through the Government Guaranteed Home Lending Scheme in August was quickly absorbed. While the society's funding totalled \$6.8 million, the number of lenders qualifying for the scheme also increased.

If additional funding is secured more families, particularly in smaller regional centres, will be able to access loans to buy their first property or Housing

Commission home. The society sources funds commercially backed by a NSW Government guarantee and I shall continue lobbying the Minister for Housing to increase the available funding.■



Peter Draper MP hands over a \$2 million cheque for loan funding to T&DCHS board members, from left: Bruce Treloar, Ralph Kidson, Paul Bentley and John Blackburn.

WorkCover NSW needs overhaul

Changes to NSW WorkCover legislation are having a devastating affect on the operations of many country based companies.

While the adjustments were intended to trap employers trying to avoid WorkCover premiums or who under declared wages, they are in fact severely penalising legitimate employers.

Under the new legislation superannuation contributions, long service leave payments, director's fees and trust distributions are counted as wages.

This has led to absurd anomalies where some farmers running their operation as a

trust are forced to include farm profits as salary in the calculation of their workers compensation premiums although they have no employees.

Small business operators are in a similar position. Superannuation payments now being assessable as wages is proving to be a real burden to farmers who have set up their businesses as family trusts.

I have raised this issue in Parliament several times and will continue to press the Minister to consult with farmers, small business operators and their advisers to modify this ill considered legislation.■



Peter Draper MP at the Redbank rest area on the Oxley Highway during construction.

Quick response

A State Government grant of \$50,000 assisted the Gunnedah Shire Council to construct a much needed amenities block at the Redbank rest area. The Council is to be congratulated for its quick response and for undertaking the construction in record time.

I approached the Minister for this funding on Council's behalf but it came with a six week time tag. It was a great effort and the new facility is a useful addition to the amenities of the region.■

If you need help on any State matter please contact my office

Phone: (02) 6766 1422 Fax: (02) 6766 6765

Email: tamworth@parliament.nsw.gov.au Website: www.peterdraper.com.au