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The Buloke Times

Est. 1875

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For the Shire of Buloke, and the districts of Birchip, Charlton, Donald, St. Arnaud, Watchem and Wycheproof

Commitment to Gender Equality

In 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was adopted by 189 governments and endorsed by thousands of activists from every part of the world – all committed to achieving gender equality.

This was a bold and transformative agenda for the empowerment of women and girls everywhere. The Platform for Action was not just a statement of intent; it was a roadmap toward a future where gender equality is not an aspiration but a lived reality.

Thirty years on, over one hundred women from across Buloke and beyond, gathered at Charlton Park for an event titled “Resilient Women. Empowered Communities” to reflect on the progress we have made and the challenges that remain.

Guest speakers Sophie Arnold and Fabian Dattner delivered thought-provoking speeches, challenging attendees to dream, take risks, take action and show up, and the panel of four remarkable young women inspired everyone.

Attendees were further motivated and challenged by the networking opportunities, engaging with other passionate and accomplished individuals in the room, as they enjoyed delicious food provided by Tuscan on Calder and drinks from Kaylene Cossar and Kim Thompson at the bar.

Welcome to Country

The day commenced on a high with an emotional and spine-tingling Welcome to Country incorporating meaning and music from Rebecca Phillips, a proud Djaara (People of the land) and Pangerang (Tall Trees People) woman of Central and North East Victoria.

Sustainable Development Goals

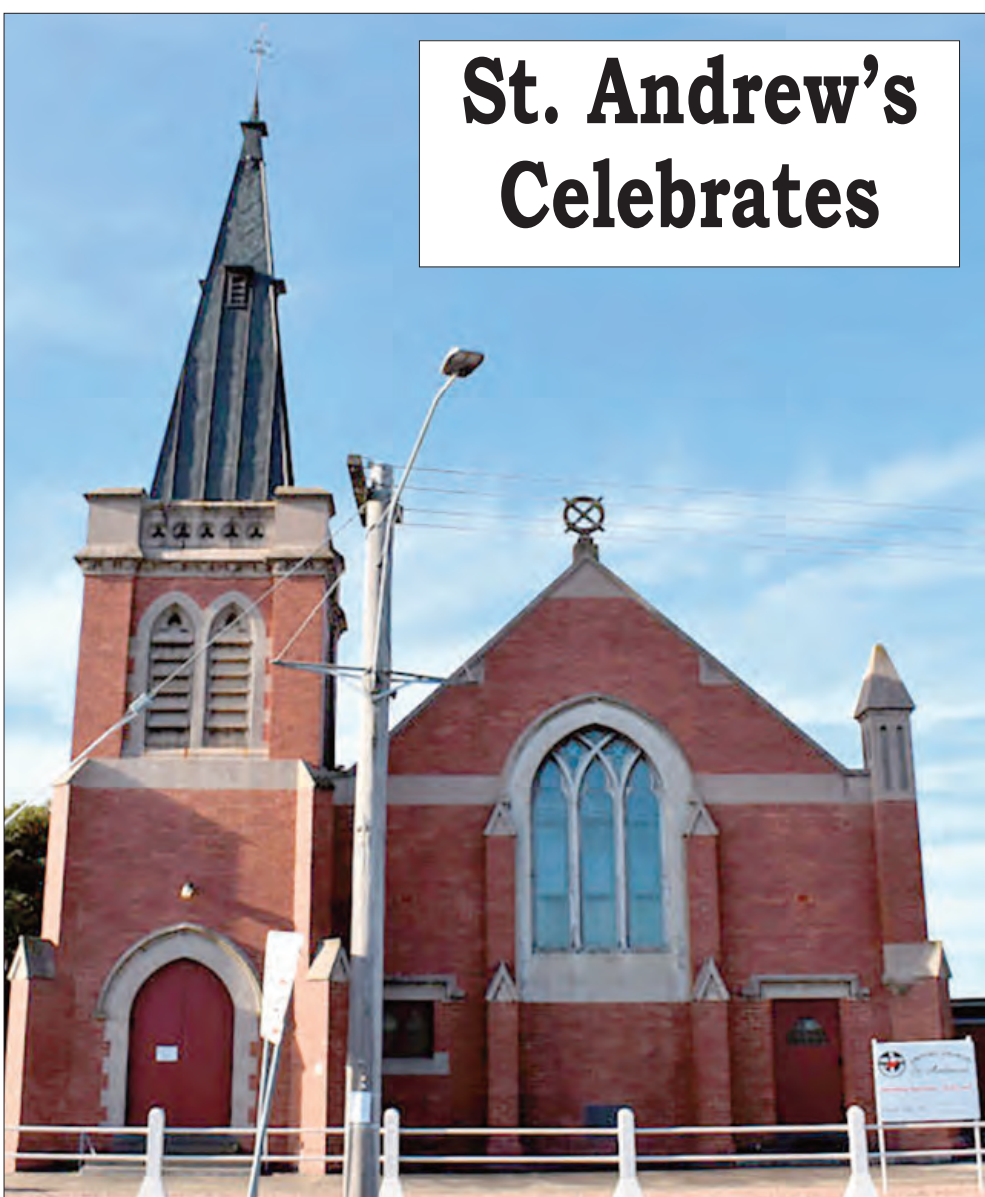
Sophie Arnold, executive manager of United Nations

• Continued on page 12.



• Host Marnie Durie from Wycheproof Neighbourhood House and Landcare handing out free Allocasuarina trees to attendees.

St. Andrew's Celebrates



Last Sunday, March 16, a packed St. Andrew's Church celebrated the centenary of the official opening of the building in Donald.

Among those who spoke during the service was Isabelle Flett, whose address appears on pages 8 and 9 of today's "Buloke Times".

Buloke to Share in Rail Crossing Grants

Regional railway crossings across Victoria will receive important safety upgrades thanks to over \$54 million in shared funding from the Federal and State Governments.

The 32 high-priority railway level crossing improvements across the state's regional rail network are being funded under Round 2 of the Regional Level Crossing Upgrade Fund (RLCUF), which is jointly funded by both levels of government.

Throughout the Mallee electorate, 12 level crossings will share in \$21 million of joint funding.

• Buloke Shire Council will receive \$1.6 million to upgrade the crossing at Boort-Charlton Road, Charlton.

• Gannawarra Shire Council will receive: \$1.8 million for Kangaroo Lake Road, Lake Charm; \$1.8 million for Worsleys Road, Tragowel.

• Loddon Shire Council will receive: \$1.8 million for Mologa Durham Ox Road at Pyramid Hill; \$1.8 million for

Prices Road, Pyramid Hill; \$1.6 million for Bridgewater-Dunolly Road, Arnold; \$1.6 million for Bridgewater-Dunolly Road, Llanelly.

• Swan Hill Rural City Council will receive: \$1.8 million for Aerodrome Extension Road, Swan Hill; \$1.8 million for Jeffer Road, Tresco; \$1.8 million for Maher Road, Swan Hill; \$1.8

• Continued on page 2.

Birchip Forum Meets

Birchip Community Forum met on March the 24th to discuss the 2025-2029 Buloke Strategic Plan, roads and safety and to review the recent Mali Heart Art Festival.

Executive members of the Forum attended the recent council summit to discuss the new Buloke Strategic Plan. Areas of concern that were identified were water management, community facilities, roads, asset rationalisation, main street vitality, housing, tourism and accommodation, health and safety. Forum agreed it will work towards creating short-

term achievable goals, with the input of community members, to assist with the strategic plan and the Birchip town plan. An invitation will be sent out for a future Forum meeting where local committees will be invited to provide their wants and needs for funding.

Road Safety

It was discussed that road safety and speeding in the

town was an ongoing concern. The Birchip Five Ways, a dangerous intersection, has been prioritised as a major project by Regional Roads Victoria.

Forum commended the efforts of its sub-committee on the organisation and running of the successful Mali Heart Art Festival over the long

• Continued on page 2.

A Time to Celebrate

As reported in Tuesday's "Buloke Times", representatives of three major sports met in Charlton last Sunday to launch the 2025 season of North-Central football, netball and hockey.

In the process, mention was made of a memorable milestone being reached this year.

In making that observation, the president of the North-Central Hockey Association, Janelle Barbary, touched on issues of paramount importance not only to sporting activities, but also to all other endeavours in which teamwork is of the utmost necessity.

"The Times" appreciates the opportunity to share with our readers the following thoughts expressed by Janelle at Sunday's launch.

*

"It's great to see so many familiar faces here as we kick off the 2025 season for football, netball, and hockey. A special welcome to our life members – it's always fantastic to have you with us. Your dedication

The Buloke Times

FRIDAY, MARCH 28, 2025

over the years has helped shape our clubs into what they are today, and we truly appreciate it.

"This year is particularly special for hockey, as we celebrate 60 years of the North Central Hockey Association. That's six decades of players, coaches, umpires, and volunteers working together to grow the game and create opportunities for people of all ages to get involved. It's a milestone that reflects the strength and passion of our hockey community, and it's something we can all be proud of.

"We also take a moment tonight to acknowledge the recent passing of Kathy Hose. She was a dedicated part of our hockey community, giving so much to the game and to those around her. Her contributions won't be forgotten.

"We also want to recognise the merger of the Wycheproof-Narraport and Nullawil teams. Change is never easy, but coming together brings new opportunities.

We honour the history of both clubs and the strong traditions they bring into this next chapter. By working together, we continue to build our competitions and ensure a strong future for our players and supporters.

"But tonight is about more than just launching another season – it's about celebrating how our three sports work together to strengthen our clubs and our community. While we each play different games, we share the same passion for sport, teamwork, and supporting each other. When we work together – whether it's through shared resources, encouraging players to try multiple sports, or just turning up to cheer each other on – it makes all of us stronger.

"A big thank you to everyone who helps make our competitions happen – players, coaches, umpires, volunteers, and supporters. The effort you put in doesn't go unnoticed, and it's what keeps local sport thriving.

"A special mention to our sponsors, Bendigo Bank, Russ Studio Jewellers, Just Hockey and St Arnaud Betta Electrical; your support and sponsorship is greatly appreciated.

"Here's to a great season ahead – good luck to everyone, and most importantly, enjoy it!"

Tractor Pull for Donald Show

Dust off your old tractors, vintage or classic, there will be a tractor pull at this year's Donald Show!

With Charlton Show holding a classic and vintage tractor pull for the last couple of years, Donald has decided to get in on the action too, creating even more local opportunities to get involved with a favourite pastime.

This might also entice others from further afield to travel over to the region to attend tractor pulls at two locations within a week's time of each event.

There will also be a static display for those machines which might not have what it

takes to put the strain on the chain.

If you have a tractor you would like to enter in this year's Donald Show Tractor Pull or static display, please call Neil McEwen on 0428 915 259 or James Doak on 0427 503 551.



• Above: The tractor pull at last year's Charlton Show included vintage and classic tractors.



• The tractor pull at last year's Charlton Show gained much interest and drew a sizeable, appreciative crowd.

Birchip Forum Meets

• Continued from page 1.

weekend. The festival stall holders provided positive feedback and a review of the event will be conducted in more detail with the potential of creating a paid festival event organiser in the future.

Swimming

The committee noted that there were excellent attendance numbers at the shire pools this season and the early morning swimming sessions were very successful. The

Birchip community contributed significantly to life-guard numbers this year, enabling the pools to stay open across the shire and this was appreciated by every pool user.

The Birchip Community Forum would like to make an inventory of all missing road/street signs in and around the township. If you notice a sign that needs replacing or repairing, then please email Seamus at SeamusLowry48@gmail.com.

Buloke to Share in Rail Crossing Grants

• Continued from page 1.

million for TAFE Training Farm, Swan Hill.

Upgrades

Each one of these existing passive level crossings will be upgraded to include flashing lights, boom gates and axle counters.

These upgrades will significantly improve safety for locals, whether they are drivers or pedestrians.

The RLCUF aims to improve railway crossing safety in regional areas and reduce serious and fatal accidents

that have a devastating impact on communities.

The 32 level crossing upgrades across Victoria will include treatments such as installing boom gates, axle counters, flashing lights and signage.

The state and federal Governments are working together to deliver critical safety upgrades that ensure people living in regional and rural areas can get where they need to go safely and efficiently.

For more information visit: Regional Australia Level Crossing Safety Program.



Police Beat

Gannawarra

Theft of motor vehicle:

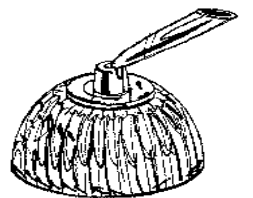
Between 1 p.m. Saturday the 15th of March and Monday the 17th, a 2020 dark grey land cruiser ute was stolen from a property on Paton Road, Ninetyone, near Quambatook. The ute had a black bull bar, several aerials mounted to the bull bar, and spotlights. At the time of the theft, it also had two orange rotating lights mounted to the tray frame (like an escort vehicle lights).

Swan Hill

Theft of motorcycle:

In the early hours of Saturday, the 15th of March, an unregistered 2002 red Honda motorcycle CRF250 was stolen from an address in Wonnong Court, Swan Hill.

Drug Possession: On Thursday the 20th of March, police intercepted a vehicle in the Swan Hill area. The vehicle was searched and a quantity of what is alleged to be methyl amphetamine was located. The 38-year-old female driver was arrested, charged and bailed to attend court at a later date.



Letter to the Editor

Team Teal Campaign

(The Editor, "The Times")

Dear Editor.—Many thanks to the patrons at the Birchip Trots whose donations raised \$2800 for the "Women Can Team Teal Campaign" raising funds for research into Women's cancers.

Also, thanks to the magnificent volunteers from the S.E.S. who manned (or is that womanned?) the gate.

We have also raised \$1100 for the same cause from the collection of the 10 cent refund containers deposited at the Campbell Street site near the Birchip Hotel.

Funds raised from this site will now go to the Birchip Friends of EWS, who raise funds for the local hospital.

Let's keep collecting folks and we can inject thousands of dollars into the community and also help our environment.

Maurice Hogan.

Enjoyment & Employment —
Have Both, Shop in Your Own Town!

Food Bank Fundraiser

Birchip P-12 School students conducted a fundraising activity for Food Bank on Tuesday, March 18.

Food Bank is the major contributor to the school's Breakfast Club program. The Student Board organised a successful "Healthy Food Day", where students had the opportunity to purchase and build their own lunch using a variety of fresh salad ingredients. The lunch also featured the option to purchase nutritious smoothies.

The objective was to promote healthy eating choices amongst the students. All profits from the event were generously donated to Food Bank.

The day was very successful, with high participation and enthusiasm from the school community. There will

be another fundraiser in May, as part of the "Thursday Night Dinners", at the Birchip Leisure Centre to raise more funds for Food Bank.

Explore Day

Birchip P-12 students Annabelle Bennett, along with ten senior students from the local region, recently attended the CSU Explore Day to discover more about Agriculture and Animal Studies courses.

CSU provided informative sessions about their courses and had staff available to help with specific questions about entry requirements and pathway options for students. Students toured the 2000-hectare farm and observed the



use of autonomous cropping equipment and the automatic scales in the lamb feedlot.

The students were also fortunate to have an impromptu Q and A with current students, Josh Diss (East Loddon) and Alyssa Boyd (Boort), who provided them with an insight to the CSU student experience. Another highlight was CSU student Issy Morrison (East Loddon) providing a tour of her accommodation. This experience was supported by NCLLEN.



• Students Board members Keira Lowry and Allie Knights assist students to create their lunch for "Healthy Food Day."

Saving Families Time and Money: Free Healthy Breakfast

More than 1,100 schools across the state are now serving free, healthy breakfasts thanks to the Victorian Government's School Breakfast Clubs Program – giving busy families one less thing to worry about as they start the day.

School Breakfast Clubs provide free healthy breakfasts for every student – making sure they start the day on a full stomach, ready to learn. They also provide lunches, snacks and take-home food packs for students and families in need, delivered in partnership with Foodbank Victoria.

A \$21.1 million boost in the Victorian Budget 2024/25 has made the program available to every government school, building on the \$141.2 million invested in the program since 2016.

More than 100 new schools have opted-in during the last 12 months, with that number expected to reach 150 by June.

This will give more than 600,000 students across the state, including those in Northern Victorian schools, access to free breakfasts that meet healthy eating guidelines, prioritising fresh and locally-produced foods. Menu options include cereals, fresh fruit, soups and rice dishes.

Since the program was established, School Breakfast

Clubs have served 52 million meals; 140 schools have also hosted cooking classes for families to help them prepare healthy, affordable meals at home.

The free Schools Breakfast Club Program is just one way the Victorian Government is helping families with cost-of-living pressures. The \$400 School Saving Bonus is also saving families money on uniforms, textbooks, camps and more, while Smile Squad free checkups are saving them a trip to the dentist.

Women in Agriculture Conference, August 5-7

Australian Women in Agriculture (AWiA) is pleased to announce that the 2025 National Conference will be held in Adelaide from August 5-7 at the Stamford Grand.

The conference theme, "Growing Futures – Breaking Barriers", reflects AWiA's commitment to empowering women in the agricultural sector and fostering leadership, innovation, and advocacy.

AWiA acting president Cressida Cains said the 2025 conference will be a significant event, bringing together women from across Australia who are passionate about the future of agriculture.

"This conference is an opportunity for women in agriculture to connect, learn, and be inspired," she said.

"We will explore leadership, communication, advocacy, sustainability and

renewables and new technologies to equip women with the tools to navigate the challenges and opportunities in the industry. It will be an event where women can share knowledge, develop new skills, and support each other in shaping the future of agriculture."

The three-day event will feature a diverse lineup of keynote speakers, expert panel discussions, interactive workshops, and networking opportunities designed to encourage collaboration and knowledge-sharing among women working in all areas of agriculture. The program will cover key themes such as

leadership and influence, business and innovation, sustainability, climate resilience, and future pathways for women in agriculture.

AWiA invites all members, industry professionals, and stakeholders to save the date and be part of important conversations about the future of women in agriculture.

Further details, including the full conference program and speaker announcements, will be released in the coming months.

For more information and updates, visit www.awia.org.au/conference or follow AWiA on social media at [@austwomeninag](https://twitter.com/austwomeninag)

Mallee Misses Out Again

Mallee residents will struggle with the cost-of-living for longer under Labor's fourth budget, potholes will grow larger in regional roads, and the regional health workforce crisis will persist, Member for Mallee and Shadow Assistant Minister for Regional Health, Dr Anne Webster, said this week.

"This is a tricky budget from a tricky government that seeks to deflect blame for rivers of red ink, while delivering nothing for regional Australia," Dr Webster said.

"The Federal Government pretends it never said 97 times before the last election that power prices would permanently come down by \$275. Tuesday's budget provides \$75 relief payments for two quarters, a band-aid for a gaping wound. Australians are smarter than that. They know their power prices have gone up \$1,300 under Labor, due to mismanagement of energy policy and a reckless railroading of renewables across Mallee and other regional electorates.

"This is a budget with cheap, election eve tricks of a \$5 a week tax cut and two \$75 quarterly energy bill relief payments. Meanwhile, Labor's government spending-driven home-grown inflation crisis will continue."

Blame

"On Tuesday the Treasurer sought to blame Labor's debt and deficits on ex-tropical cyclone Alfred, President Trump, wars in Ukraine and Israel or the former Coalition Government and voters are seeing right through that. As I told the House earlier, these have been hard years under Labor and Mallee voters are hanging out for the upcoming election.

"Labor has squandered the rivers of gold of resources and income tax revenue, while delivering no meaningful productivity reform. Regional Australia has missed out with no new funding for the Stronger Communities program, Local Roads and Community Infrastructure program, Growing Regions program or the Regional Precincts and Partnership program, critical to building community infrastructure in regional Australia.

"Federal debt will cripple



• Anne Webster.

our economy, with a shock jump from the previously projected 2025/26 \$15.8 billion surplus, with a \$44 billion leap into the red – a \$27.6 billion deficit. The deficit is projected to grow to \$42.1 billion over forward estimates. Interest payments on all that debt will rise from \$23.9 billion this year to \$41.7 billion in the 2029 financial year, at that point exceeding the annual funding Canberra gives to states and territories for hospitals, even exceeding at that point the annual outlay on Medicare."

Corack East Wind

Renewable Energy from ACEN



ACEN Australia is in the early stages of investigating a large-scale wind energy project in Buloke Shire in Western Victoria, called **Corack East Wind**. The development is proposed to be located on privately owned land between Donald, Birchip and Wycheproof.

Drop-in information Hub
Every Wednesday 1pm-6pm

Charlton Park Community
Bank Complex
Boardroom

Commencing 19 March, 2025

Meet the project team, find out more
and provide feedback

Charlton Park Community Bank Complex
Calder Hwy, Charlton

www.corackeastwind.com.au

1800 498 550

info@corackeastwind.com.au

Corack East Wind

"Times" Classifieds

Phone Donald 5497 1222, Birchip 5492 2735 Email admin@buloketimes.com

Deadlines:—

Tuesday's Issue: Classified advertisements (single column), 10 a.m. Monday. Display advertisements (2 or more columns), 3 p.m. Friday prior. **Friday's Issue:** Classified advertisements (single column), 10 a.m. Thursday. Display advertisements (2 or more columns), 3 p.m. Wednesday prior.

WATCHEM PANTHERS CRICKET CLUB

Season Breakup and "B" grade Premiership Celebration

Sunday, March 30
at 2 p.m.

AT THE CLUB ROOMS

All players throughout the year/s, family, sponsors and supporters are invited to come along.

Please bring a plate of afternoon tea to share.
See you there.

AMBULANCE
PHONE NO.
000



Printed and published for the proprietors by Robin Letts, at the office of "The Buloke Times", 6 McCulloch Street, Donald.

JEFFCOTT NORTH LANDCARE

Meeting

Election of Office Bearers

WED. APRIL 2

7 p.m.

At Adam and Kathy Campbell's

DONALD GOLF Opening Days

SUN., APRIL 6

Men's & Ladies' events

12 noon assembly

12.30 hit-off

Please bring afternoon tea.

WED, APRIL 2

Ladies' Opening Day

12 hole Ambrose

9.30 a.m. assembly for
10 a.m. start

Please bring afternoon tea.

Beginners welcome

Lessons starting

at 10 a.m. on

Sunday April 13, and

Monday April 14.

Litchfield Public Hall ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday, April 9th
at 7:30 pm

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Wimmera Mallee Environmental and Agricultural Protection Association Inc.

Come and be a part of a question and answer
session on Renewable and Mining Projects

Monday, March 31, 7 p.m.

At the Warracknabeal Community Centre,
Anzac Park, Warracknabeal

See us on Facebook | All Welcome

Free Morning Tea

AT BIRCHIP NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSE

Tuesday April 1

10-12 noon

Mallee Family Care & Visiting Service Providers

will be in attendance and available to
answer your questions

Call in for a cuppa and a chat



Birchip Neighbourhood House

At the Shamrock, 77 Cumming Avenue Birchip3483

Ph. 5492 2735 Mobile: 0429 922 735

Email: birchipblc@bigpond.com Web: www.birchip.vic.au

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“Times” Classifieds

Poultry Shed Erector

Casual Position

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If you are interested, please phone
Eddy on 0428 481 811.

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We're building teams for clients
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If you like to do support work and are happy to do some sleepover shifts then I'd love to hear from you to see if you're a match!

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Registered Nurse

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Food and Domestic Service Assistant

St Arnaud

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Big Battery Rescue Challenge

Stockland is again partnering with The National Theatre for Children (NTC) for the 2025 Big Battery Rescue School Challenge – a nationwide initiative aimed at educating and inspiring students about the importance of battery recycling and its environmental impact.

Launching in March 2025, the program will run until December, reaching 23 schools and over 16,000 students across 21 of Stockland's masterplanned communities in Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia.

Since 2020, the program has engaged over 80,000 students and 2,000 teachers and has diverted more than 25,000 kilograms of batteries from landfill.

Stockland Sustainability Manager, Penny Barker, said

the initiative highlights Stockland's commitment to creating social value and fostering sustainable communities.

Benefits

"We're committed to delivering social, economic, and environmental benefits for local communities through purposeful investment and collaboration.

"Programs like the Big Battery Rescue with NTC enable us to better educate our local communities and families about the importance of battery recycling through a fun and engaging program," Ms Barker said.

"It's been great to see children so involved in the challenge over the past few years and we look forward to continuing our work with NTC to see what we can achieve with local schools again this year.

"Across Australia, only 12% of used batteries are recycled," says Tobias Benn, Managing Director at NTC.

"Through interactive theatre, memorable characters, and engaging performances, we empower children and families to take real environmental action."

Collect and Recycle

Students will collect and recycle all types of batteries, helping reduce waste and prevent pollution.

"By making sustainability fun and relatable, this program creates lasting habits

and measurable community impact," Tobias added.

The program features live performances, hands-on activities, digital tools, printed workbooks, and teacher resources, along with a school-wide battery collection service. An online portal

tracks progress, measures environmental impact, and provides educational resources.

Residents can also drop off used batteries at participating schools, expanding the program's reach.

Down the Middle

With the change in the weather many minds turn to winter sports and the Donald golf ladies are no exception.

Even though there's been no rain and the course is very dry, we're all looking forward to opening day next Wednesday, April 2nd. We will open with an Ambrose event with assembly at 9.30 for a 10 a.m. start. Afternoon tea will follow so please bring a small plate to share.

The grounds committee and other willing workers have been very busy over the summer months making improvements to the course and keeping the water up to the tees. Some of the ladies have also been occupied sanding and re-painting the tee marker signs, so thanks to all those who have put in the hours to get the course ready.

Weir's IGA has kindly donated an Easter hamper which the club will be raffling

over the coming days, so many thanks to them for that

Player Profile:

Kerry Raven.

How long have you been playing golf? 56 years.

What do you enjoy about golf? The fact that every round is different.

What is the best part of your game? Driving.

What advice would you give to anyone thinking of taking up golf? Take lessons and it's a very social game.

What is your best score? 67.

What is your best shot ever? The shot when I outdrove Joan Beckham (Mum) for the first time.

Who is your favourite golfer? Joan Beckham.

Position held in the club? Ladies' Captain.

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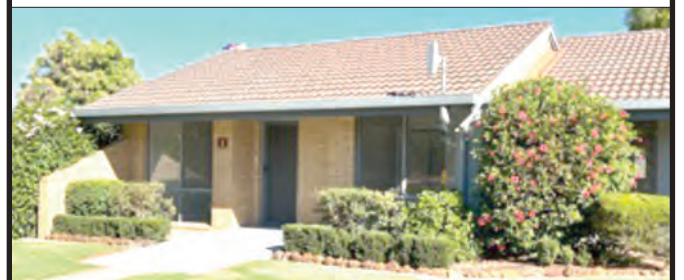


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Anthony Hogan
Chief Executive Officer

Election Commitments On Rural Healthcare: Federal Budget Sets the Stage

While the 2025–26 Federal Budget, released this week, delivers some welcome investments in healthcare, the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) is urging all political parties to step up and prioritise rural, remote, and First Nations healthcare in their election platforms.

ACRRM President Dr Rod Martin says the Budget contained no surprises, reinforcing the need for a clear commitment from all sides of politics on how they will ensure funding reaches the communities that need it most.

“With an election on the horizon, this is the time for political leaders to put forward concrete plans that will make a real difference in rural and remote Australia,” Dr Martin says.

“The government has committed approximately \$8.5 billion in healthcare funding over four years, and the Liberal Party of Australia has said they’ll match it – but there is little clarity on how much will directly benefit rural and remote Australians – they deserve detail and ACRRM expect it.”

Key Budget Highlights

- \$7.9 billion in Medicare payment, with increases for standard consultations, to up to \$86.91 in remote areas.
- A Bulk Billing Practice Incentive Program.
- \$1.8b to fund public hospitals and health services in 2025 - 2026.
- \$689 million to be spent over four years to reduce the cost of most medications listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.
- \$573m for women’s reproductive health and menopause.

Sweetener

“The sweetener is a \$265.2 million investment to expand the pipeline of future General Practitioners (GPs) and Rural Generalists (RGs), supporting

ACRRM’s ongoing call for at least 500 Rural Generalist training places annually,” Dr Martin said.

“We will be watching closely to ensure these training places are allocated where they are most needed, supporting the growing demand for ACRRM training, addressing the greatest and most urgent workforce shortages, and improving healthcare for people living in rural and remote communities.”

Critical Gaps

Despite these investments, Dr Martin says the Budget fails to address critical gaps in rural healthcare, including the ongoing closure of rural maternity services.

“The latest data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare shows that nearly 80,000 women give birth outside Australia’s cities each year,” he said.

“At the same time, reports of rural maternity unit closures continue to emerge from all corners of the country.

“Each closure weakens health in rural and remote communities just a little bit more.

No Commitment

“There has been no commitment to turn this around.

“Targeted funding is desperately needed to attract and retain the rural maternity workforce, including Rural Generalists skilled in obstetrics and anaesthetics, to ensure women in rural and remote communities can access safe, high-quality maternity care close to home.



• ACRRM President Dr Rod Martin.

“We would also like to see RG-specific MBS item numbers to incentivise and support key specialised services in rural and remote locations that are currently grossly underserved.

“ACRRM will keep advocating for a Rural Health Service Providers Infrastructure Support Fund to address critical gaps in essential infrastructure, such as accommodation and childcare.

“Investing in these areas is key to making rural communities more liveable, sustainable, and attractive to healthcare professionals and their families.

“The College will now turn its attention to the upcoming election.

“Rural, remote and First Nations people deserve more than just broad healthcare funding announcements.

“They need real solutions that ensure they receive quality, accessible and affordable healthcare that is sustainable and delivered as close to home as possible.”



• Anti-theft number plate screws are a proven deterrent to protect vehicle number plates.

To Combat Number Plate Theft... Call for Anti-Theft Screws

[From the RACV]

With almost 27,000 number plates stolen across Victoria in 2024, representing a 45.8 per cent increase since 2023, RACV is calling on the Victorian Government to require new and second-hand vehicle dealerships to install number plates with anti-theft screws. This requirement could be phased in, starting with standard number plates.

The latest data from the Victorian Crime Statistics Agency reveals a concerning ten-year high in number plate thefts, with almost 27,000 reported cases in the 12-month period ending December 31, 2024, up from 18,480 the previous year.

RACV Head of Policy James Williams said on average there are 73 number plate thefts in Victoria per day and that people should be aware that the best deterrent from physical theft is to install anti-theft screws. To deter cloning, registration numbers should be illegible when publishing an image of a car online.

“RACV is calling on the Victorian Government to require new and second-hand vehicle dealerships to install number plates with anti-theft screws and for VicRoads to provide individuals with anti-theft screws to install on new or replacement number plates,” Mr Williams said.

“RACV is also calling on the government to release the outcomes of the technology trials that were announced in 2019, to combat number plate theft and cloning.”

Bambi Gordon, CEO of Neighbourhood Watch Victoria said, while number plate theft seems like a low-level crime, the reality is it can lead to serious issues for motorists – including identity theft and other crimes.

“Number plates remain the most commonly stolen item from vehicles, with thieves able to remove standard plates in under 10 seconds,” Ms Gordon said.

“Stolen plates are being used to commit other crimes including fuel theft, drug trafficking, ram raids, burglaries, police evasion, and avoiding traffic infringements.

“Beyond physical theft, criminals are now also engaging in ‘virtual theft’ by copying registration details from photos posted online to car sales websites or social media, printing them on laminated paper or 3D printers to attach over their own plates.

“The financial impact for victims is significant, with replacement costs ranging from \$39 to \$293 depending on plate type, plus the time taken waiting for replacement plates. Additionally, driving without displaying proper number plates can result in a \$385 fine and three demerit points.”

Safe Plate Days

Neighbourhood Watch, in partnership with Victoria Police and RACV, is hosting Safe Plate Days where volunteers install anti-theft screws. Anti-theft screws are also available from auto shops, hardware stores, and service stations.

If number plates are stolen, victims should immediately report the theft to local police by visiting the nearest station, calling 131 444, or submitting an online form. They should then visit a VicRoads Customer Service Centre with evidence of identity to apply for new plates with different identification numbers.

For more information about upcoming Safe Plate Days, visit the Neighbourhood Watch website.

With New Smartphone App... Stay Connected in Northern Grampians

Northern Grampians Shire residents can download a free smartphone application designed to foster community connection and provide vital information before, during and after emergency events.

The CommunityConnect app, which launched this month, simplifies staying connected, engaging with community events and supporting local businesses.

Mayor Karen Hyslop said the app provided real-time updates to help make residents’ lives easier while keeping them engaged in the community.

“The app will encourage interaction among community members and is designed to foster a sense of belonging and collective responsibility,” she said.

“It’s also perfect for people who don’t use traditional

social media, as it’s a centralised noticeboard with a wealth of information at your fingertips.

“The premise is that you don’t need to visit multiple websites or look for business pages or contact details through various online searches. Instead, you log in to CommunityConnect and the information you need is in one place.”

Cr Hyslop said the app provided a platform for local businesses, community groups, residents and landowners to engage, share information and promote things happening in their region.

Key Features

“Among its key features is a business directory, so people can connect with businesses, community groups and other organisations,” she said.

“The app also has an events directory, which showcases local events, meetings and other community activities. There is a digital noticeboard, which you can easily browse and search for relevant information.”

Cr Hyslop said council staff would use the app to share important emergency preparedness and recovery information.

“This gives us an opportunity to quickly get information to the people who need it

most, in the case of events such as the Grampians bushfires in December and January,” she said.

“This is not only key during an emergency, but also through the recovery phase, which as we know can be ongoing.

“It will also allow us to push out notifications about preparing for emergencies.”

Free

The app is free and is available for both Apple users, via the app store, and Android users, via the Google Play store.

People can visit website <https://communityconnect.digit> for more information about CommunityConnect.

Church Notices

ANGLICAN
“Parish of
Charlton-Donald”

Enquiries: Rev’d Judi Bird
0435 593 359

Friday, April 4
St. Paul’s, Birchip, 5 p.m.

Sunday, April 6
St. Martin’s, Charlton, 9 a.m.
St. George’s, Donald, 11 a.m.
Holy Trinity, W’burn, 3 p.m.



www.granitecommunitychurch.com

At Granite Church
10.30 a.m.
Speaker: Ross Barnes
Baptist Union of Victoria



Be a life-maker

Everyone should have the chance to try for a family.

Public Fertility Care brings family within reach for more Victorians. But we need egg and sperm donors to make this possible.

Be a life-maker. Help make the life of a child – and family – possible.



Scan to see what it means to become a donor today.

**Become
an egg
or sperm
donor**



The text of this advertisement has been approved by the Minister for Health as required by section 40 of the Human Tissue Act 1982 (Vic) March 2024.

Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.



St. Andrew's Honours

(By Isabelle Flett)

Today as we celebrate the official opening of this building 100 years ago on the 19th of March, 1925, we give thanks for the faith and foresight of that early Presbyterian congregation.

But, more than that, we celebrate the early settlers who saw the need 52 years before, to call the Rev. Hugh McKail in 1862 to minister to the pastoralists and their employees of the St. Arnaud-Richardson River area.

Almost three years later the first manse, "The Willows", made of pine logs, was built on the west bank of the river for the Rev. McKait who had lived at first at St. Arnaud, and then at times, on station properties until the manse was ready. Fortnightly services were held there.

The land had been given by the Aitken family of Banyenong.

Site Reserved

In 1870, during the 2-year ministry of the Rev. George Tait, who was ordained at Donald, a site was reserved, and in July 1872, shortly before he left, a foundation stone was laid for the first St Andrew's Presbyterian church in Donald. Just 5 months later the building was officially opened on December 15th. Built by J. A. Meyer for the contract price of 535 pounds 10 shillings, this was the first church of any denomination in Donald, when the town consisted of only a blacksmith's shop, a store and a hotel. James Aitken, Thomas Guthrie and J.A. Meyer were part of the building committee.

In later years Rev. Tait played an important role in the extension of the Victorian church as Home Missions Superintendent. The Rev. Kennedy followed in 1873 and his wife commenced a Sunday school at "The Willows".

Three years later in 1876 St. Arnaud became a separate Charge.

With the land now open for selection, the population grew rapidly and with it the desire for a regular place of worship.

Laen Church

At Laen, John and James Flett together with A. and J. Adams were instrumental in building a church and had travelled to the Bolangum Ranges to fell trees for the timber. In September 1875, the Presbyterian congregation opened the Laen Church debt free. This was demolished in 1902 and they then joined with those further north.

Meanwhile at North Laen, services were held in a building given by George Pyers in the early 1880s and later, in 1891, moving to a new site given by W. Coates, a new church was opened, costing 175 pounds.

Rev. Swan's ministry from 1877 was followed in 1885 by Rev. Donald Cameron who also was ordained at Donald. He and his wife were the first to occupy the new manse beside the church, which served the church for 70 years before being demolished in 1955. After 2 years Mr Cameron left to become Convener of the Home Missions.

Over the following decade most ministries were short terms until 1898 with Rev Shallburg staying 8 years, during which time the Cope Cope church was built. Early services had been held in the home of James Harvey and later in the Church of England until their new church was built in 1902. The names of Gilmour, Bugge, McClelland, Crosbie, Scott and Harvey were the building committee.

In 1912 during the ministry of the Rev. John Walker, the first thoughts of a new larger church began, which became well advanced during the Rev Scarfe's ministry. A missionary was also employed. Services were held in the Laen hall, the school at Lawler, as well as the regular services at Donald, North Laen and Cope Cope.

Foundation Stone

The Rev K.C. Billinge, arriving in 1923, saw the efforts of the congregation rewarded, with the laying of the foundation stone of the new church on February 23, 1924, by Senator J. F. Guthrie. This stone had been presented by Mr and Mrs W.H. Gray. Then on March 19, 1925, the new church was officially opened at a cost of 5000 pounds, which included the furnishings. Many of the parishioners'

gifts were noted with plaques. Moderator of the Maryborough Presbytery, the Rev, Fiddian, handed the door key to Mrs Gray and the bell was rung. Built by B.M. Bassett, it seated 300 people. The "Donald Times" described it as being of red brick... a handsome addition to the town... with an imposing spire covered with sheet copper... total height being over eighty feet, including the weathercock... the main body of the church built in the traditional form of a cross.....pews and pulpit consist of pacific maple.

Glass Windows

The following Sunday the Memorial stain glass window and honour board were unveiled and dedicated by the Rev. Donald Cameron. The window depicts a Knight bearing the shield of faith. Side panels bear the inscriptions "Fight the good fight of faith" and "Endure hardness as a good soldier of Christ"

And now, 100 years later we have seen many changes. The Rev. Langhorne, The Rev. John Shaw (who baptised my late husband Ray) and the Rev. Stanley Thompson followed. Then in 1948 the Rev. H.V. Jenkin began a 14 year ministry. This was a boom time in our congregation. Young families prevailed. Regular full capacity attendances, with 160 children on the Sunday school roll and a staff of 24 teachers. This growth led to serious overcrowding for the children. Besides the old church being used as the hall, classes were in the tennis shed, and the old stable. This was a little old shed near the back fence used in the horse days. Over 40 children were crammed in there with Misses Clem Pope, Alice Flett, and Janice McArthur on Sundays.

In 1955 a new manse was built, and the following year a new church at North Laen replaced the old one. In 1959-60

church furniture was rearranged with the pulpit repositioned, new elders chairs and new carpet added, and a new organ given in memory of elder, Alan Dunn who tragically was killed in a tractor accident.

With the rearrangement of boundaries in 1958, the Maryborough Presbytery ceased to exist, with Donald and St. Arnaud rejoining the Wimmera Presbytery.

The old manse site was cleared and a building fund was begun. Rev. Robert MacLachlan arrived in 1962 and soon after plans for new buildings were drawn up. A tender for 17000 pounds was received. Deciding to build in 2 stages and to be named the Christian Education Centre, the hall, cloak room, kitchen and toilet block were built first, by Mr. Harold McClelland, and opened and dedicated on the 14th March, 1965. Six months earlier Miss Clem Pope had laid the foundation stone.



• Margaret Russell and Lorraine Pearse.

The following year the Cope Cope church was closed and moved to Metcalf where it was rededicated.

The final stage with the kindergarten, storeroom and

meeting rooms were opened in memory of Miss Pope in 1968. A fitting tribute to a loved kindergarten leader who had taught at Cope Cope for 14

• Continued on page 9.



• Isabelle Flett, Betty Wood, Mary Grace Whyte and her son Peter Whyte.



• Full house inside St. Andrew's Church. -Photos from Jodie Drake

MICHAELS OF DONALD

Belvedere By George Crenshaw
www.belvedere-cartoons.com

"How's your new trampoline going?"

CHURCHES

UNITING CHURCH (North Central Living Waters Cluster)

N.C.L.W. Cluster Service at St Arnaud, 10.30 a.m. with Rev. Gordon Wild.

Donald folk meet 9.30 a.m. at lawn in Blair St, to leave at 9.45 a.m. for St Arnaud - we will share cars.

Please bring food and lunch to share.

Next Birchip and Wycheproof Services, 10 a.m. Sunday, April 6

Contact Number: 5497 1033

Century in Donald

• **Continued from page 8.**
years and then at Donald for 20 years until 1965.

The following May, a new stained glass window given in memory of Thomas and Catherine Guthrie, parents of the late Oliver Guthrie was received and dedicated.

The original church was dismantled in 1967 shortly after Rev. I.N. Whyte arrived and the site marked where the original foundation stone is now placed. There was great jubilation when a time capsule with papers and 1872 information was found.

In 1971 a bookcase and cupboard set in the entrance porch was gifted in memory of Mr Charles Richards, former elder at Watchem and later Donald. Late in 1972, Rev. Stan Fishley's ministry began following the sad passing of Rev. Whyte in February.

Miss Joyce Laing, in 1973, at North Laen, became the first lady elder to be elected in this parish. The Uniting Church of Australia began on the 22nd June, 1977, with the coming together of the Congregational Union in Australia, and the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches of Australia. The former Methodist minister Rev. Ian Porter and Rev. Fishley shared the ministry and the congregation continued to meet in both buildings until eventually settling at St. Andrew's. In 1981 commemorative plaques were placed at the sites of the former district churches. Rev. Laurel Davey, our first female Minister who came in the drought year of 1982, led the service with the Rev. Porter at the closing of the Methodist buildings in 1986.

In 1983 major repairs were made to the memorial stained glass window which had started to buckle.

In 1989 when Rev. Roy Westaway arrived, plans to enlarge the kitchen and add a toilet for the disabled were being made, and then officially opened in 1991 by the Victorian Moderator Rev. Kerrie Graham. A bequest enabled a new piano and clavinova to be purchased and later

a sound system in the church. New carpet and pew cushions were added. Next came Rev. Stan Clark for 6 months until Rev. Malcolm Hay's ministry began in 1998, until his retirement in July, 2003.

Margaret Russell followed as a Pastor and was ordained at Donald in 2008.

Re-Opening

When the congregation decided to make the church more easily accessible, the major renovations uncovered extensive white ant damage and a front wall leaning out, which was able then to be corrected. The floor was levelled and the inside turned around. It was officially re-opened by the President of the Uniting Church, Rev. Alistair McCrae on 13th September, 2009. With the removal of some large pews replaced by single arm chairs, the church can no longer seat 300 people. The rest of the complex was also upgraded at that time.

The very community minded 10-year ministry of Rev. Margaret and husband John closed with retirement early 2014. During their time, Margaret and John and our lay people began to minister to surrounding towns of St. Arnaud, Stuart Mill, Wycheproof and Birchip. This resulted in the formation of the North Central Living Waters Cluster and a move into the Loddon Mallee Presbytery from the Presbytery of Western Victoria.

In October 2016 Rev. David Thompson became the first minister for the new Cluster, retiring 3 years later, just prior to the Covid restrictions. Since then, with help from Presbytery, we have continued without a minister in placement.

Special Times

Over the century and before, christenings, confirmations, weddings and funeral services have been special times in the lives of many. Sunday school, picnics, walk-a-thons to Jeffcott for the Bible society, concerts, fellowship groups, youth groups, catering and working bees bring happy memories.



• Above: Gathering outside the church.

• Right: Members of the committee, Mary Archbold, Rosemarie Larcombe, Bev Gilmour, Isabelle Flett and Harold Flett. Absent Marlene Davidson. —Photos from Jodie Drake

And always central has been the nurturing of the Christian faith, which inspired some to become ministers and others to serve the wider church both here and overseas.

The bricks and mortar of this century-old building have seen many come and go, but always the true church is the people who gather in worship, encouraging and supporting each other, and who serve our community in the name of Christ.



• Ruth Flett (left) and Lorraine Pearse.



• Neill Street Choir from Ballarat.

“Buy Australian” Warmly Welcomed

Farmers for Climate Action (FCA) welcomes the \$20 million Buy Australian campaign and the \$3.9 million to help farmers deal with super-markets in the Federal Budget. It also welcomes the \$150 energy bill rebate for small businesses.

However, FCA points out a golden opportunity has been missed to boost batteries on-farm, which help stabilise the grid, make farms more energy independent and store clean energy produced during the day. FCA CEO Natalie Collard said the Buy Australia campaign was warmly welcomed.

“Look after Aussie farmers, because they look after you,” Ms Collard said. “Australian farmers have a long tradition of making clean, green food and fibre, and this campaign will help more city Australians realise this. “Polling commissioned by FCA nearly 18 months ago

showed many country people thought supermarket behaviour was the second biggest threat to local farming after climate change, so it’s good to see \$3.9 million to help farmers and small businesses deal with supermarkets. “Australian farmers rely on international trade because

they export 70% of what they produce, and no discussion on trade can be had without discussing climate change. Our trading partners want more action on climate change. The biggest threat to Australia’s market access is Australian Governments not doing enough on climate change

because they’re too scared of coal and gas companies. “As the USA considers slapping Australian farmers with tariffs, our other markets such as the EU are requesting more carbon-friendly and climate-friendly produce from us.

“The budget was a golden opportunity to boost batteries on-farm. We know if we charge up farm batteries, we help stabilise the grid, make farms more energy independent and store clean energy produced during the day. We hope farm batteries get charged up by Federal dollars soon.”

Community feedback shapes final study scope for VNI West



Throughout TCV’s ongoing engagement with landholders and community members, several key concerns have been raised consistently about the potential impacts of the VNI West transmission project. Late last year, many people took the time to formally share their views through the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) EES scoping consultation process.

That feedback has helped shape the Final Scoping Requirements (now published), which sets out what must be investigated as part of the Environmental Effects Statement (EES) - Victoria’s most rigorous environmental and social assessment.

Four key themes emerged from community submissions:

- Housing availability and potential solutions during construction
- Mental health and wellbeing impact for residents
- Accessibility concerns for farming equipment around transmission lines and the impact of the project on floodwaters
- Biosecurity concerns about the potential spread of weeds or pathogens that could affect agriculture.

Due to these submissions, the final scope reflects these priorities, ensuring they will be properly assessed. You can view the requirements in full here: <https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/environmental-assessments/browse-projects/referrals/victoria-to-new-south-wales-interconnector-west-victorian-component>

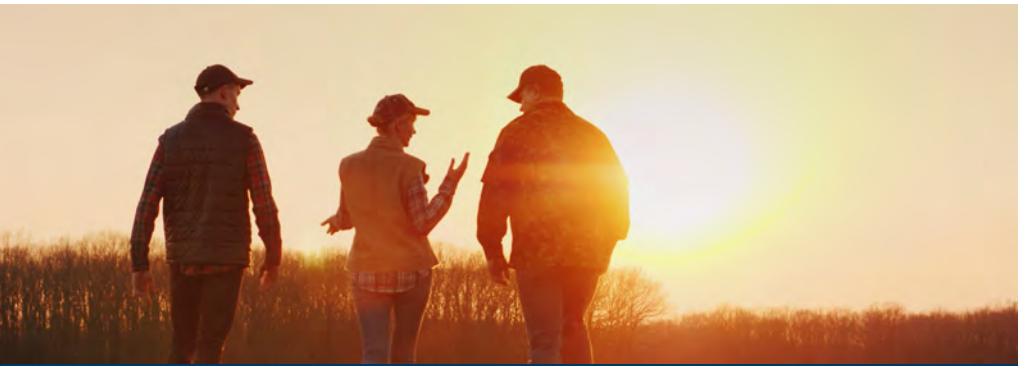
Your voice matters

TCV knows that VNI West will have real impacts on landholders and communities, which is why we remain committed to listening, learning and acting on local concerns.

The EES process will not only assess potential impacts but also explore ways to minimise them – shaped by both technical studies and ongoing community input.

As we continue these studies, we want to keep hearing from you. Local knowledge is critical to getting this right, and we encourage landholders and community members to stay involved.

To find out more about the project, and the EES process, or have your say, visit our website transmissionvictoria.com.au or scan the QR code.



Web: transmissionvictoria.com.au
Free call: 1800 824 221
Email: enquiries@transmissionvictoria.com.au
Facebook: @TransmissionVictoria



A Blood Moon

I find it fascinating to look up on a cloudless night and see a vast array of stars spread across the sky.

Some astronomers estimate that there are more stars in the sky than grains of sand on planet earth! Recently (March 14th) many thousands of us on the eastern side of Australia were looking skywards, not so much to look at the stars but to look towards the moon as a lunar eclipse was taking place.

What exactly is a lunar eclipse? A lunar eclipse occurs when the earth passes directly between the sun and the moon thus the earth casts a deep shadow across the lunar surface. This event is sometimes called a “Blood Moon” because of the reddish tinge the full moon generally takes on when eclipsed.

Astronomers tell us that as the Sun’s rays pass through the earth’s atmosphere some colours in the light spectrum are filtered out. It is the same mechanism that causes colourful sunrises and sunsets of which red is a predominant colour. Red wavelengths are least affected by this effect so the light reaching the moon’s surface has a reddish hue.

The Bible tells us that a major purpose of the moon is to “shine on the earth” at night time (Genesis 1:16). The moon reflects the sun’s light on to earth even when the sun is on the other side of the earth. The moon’s diameter is around one quarter of that of the earth and so, the

reflective surface of the moon is much bigger than any other space body close to earth. It is true to say that the moon’s light is the light that rules the night on planet earth.

Gravity

Science writer Russell Griggs reminds us that the pull of the moon’s gravity on the earth brings us vital benefits such as tidal movement. As the moon orbits the rotating earth, there is a cycle of two high tides and two low tides about every 25 hours. Tides are necessary to cleanse the ocean’s shorelines and help keep the ocean water moving and not stagnating. Also, scientists have learnt in more recent times that the moon has a vital role in stabilising the earth and keeping it tilted at an angle of 23.5 degrees on it’s axis of rotation in relation to the sun. This tilt is essential in providing us with our seasons – necessary for the growth of seasonal crops and giving us wonderful variety in temperature and weather with our summer, autumn, winter and spring seasonal conditions. The more we learn about our universe, we realise how amazing it all is.

Design

The wonderful design in our creation does not so much speak of a “big bang”, but the orderly creative acts of an Almighty Creator who made



• Bruce Stewart

the sun, the moon, the stars – everything.

The Bible says: “When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers – the moon and the stars you set in place, what are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them?” (Psalm 8:3,4).

The size, wonder and complexity of the universe around us speaks of an incredible Creator, God, and yet we human beings – seemingly insignificant compared to the immensity of the universe are loved and valued.

Professor Andy C. McIntosh formerly of University of Leeds says this: “May many see that the argument from design (the wonder and complexity of the universe) shouts powerfully of the Creator who spans the Heavens and yet stooped to become Man, in order to be our Saviour.”

The moon is a good example of the heavens declaring God’s glory (Psalm 19:1). Observing a clear night sky, including when we have a lunar eclipse, reminds us of the size and majesty of our creation. Let’s give thanks and praise to the Creator of it all.

Bruce Stewart.

“Times” Crossword

QUICK PUZZLE NO. 8170 - SOLUTIONS

Across - 1, Schizophrenia. 8, Psalm. 9, Attract. 10, Lather. 11, Borage. 12, Limit. 14, Rival. 18, Animal. 20, Escort. 23, Whimper. 24, Piano. 25, Golden wedding.
Down - 1, Supple. 2, Heart. 3, Zambesi. 4, Peak. 5, Ratio. 6, Niagara. 7, Anthem. 13, Initial. 15, Inspid. 16, Earwig. 17, Strong. 19, Apple. 21, Okapi. 22, Crow.

Charlton Bowls Tourney – Take 2

After cancelling on February 6, because of heat, Charlton Bowling Club Inc found an alternate date of Thursday, March 20, to try once more.

With weather conditions forecasting rain and wind, play got under way as planned at 10 a.m. when all eighteen teams arrived. Charlton had two teams, plus Boort, Calavil, Donald, Donald Golf, Kerang, Pyramid Hill, St. Arnaud, St. Arnaud Country Club, Quambatook, Wedderburn and Wycheproof. The day commenced with a roll to the ditch with leaders, seconds, thirds and skips rolling at different times to decide four winners.

With three games to be played, and the weather showery, the match committee decision was to play 12 ends first game before lunch, followed by two games of eight ends. In each game the heavens opened, with bowlers going for their coats, and then the sun came out again, coats came off, until the next shower came blowing through. Overall, players got through the day with a few showers, with two Donald teams winning their three

games. On a countback Donald team of Alison McEwen, Luke Kelly, Ian (Tiger) McEwen, and the Donald stalwart Norm Hollis, was the winner. Runners-up: Donald Golf's Bill Livingston, Tony Dionisopoulos, Geoff Rigby and another Donald Golf stalwart Stewart Hollis. Third prize went to a Boort team with two wins and a draw with Dot Gibson, Lynne Carroll, John Gibson and Greg Carroll.

President Michael O'Brien thanked all bowlers for their support on the day and he expressed the gratitude towards their sponsors, Teys Charlton Feedlot for supplying the meat for the meat and

gravy rolls, MoGas Diesel, Napier Park Funerals, MOR Financial Planners, Starts Bus & Charter Services, Charlton Medical, Mulquiny Fuels, J & K Cox, F P Nevins and Co, and Turf Engineering,

Raffle vouchers were donated by Jack High Bowls Shop, Donaldson's Tyre Service and Charlton IGA Supermarket. Thank you to the sponsors as listed above for their support.



Pickleball has become a popular pastime in Stawell. Northern Grampians Shire Council is looking to launch a formal competition and is calling for expressions of interest.

Pickleball All the Rage

With a new competition in works March 26, 2025, Northern Grampians Shire Council is investigating the launch of a formal Pickleball competition in Stawell – a first for the region.

Pickleball is a mix of tennis, table tennis and badminton played on a badminton-size court with a paddle and a small, perforated plastic ball.

It is one of the fastest-growing sports in Australia, with many Stawell and district residents participating in a social competition following a successful come-and-try day in July last year. The come-and-try day, at Stawell Sports and Aquatic Centre, SSAC, was instigated through a partnership between the council, Pickleball Victoria and Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly.

Mayor Karen Hyslop said following the success of the come-and-try event, which attracted more than 40 participants, the council launched a short-term social Pickleball program.

"The people who tried their hand at the game quickly noticed the benefits," she said.

Low-Impact

"It is low-impact physical exercise, the sport is easy to learn, suitable for any age and is simply a lot of fun. Some people enjoy the competition aspect, while others play primarily for the social benefits."

Pickleball Australia Association executive officer, Brendan Lee, said the sport could be played in singles or doubles format, but the big draw was the ease at which a new player could pick up the game. He said he believed

underarm serves and small courts made it more a game of chess than an athletic contest.

Cr Hyslop said the council's social pickleball program – which was free for anyone who wanted to participate and ran for 16 weeks – was well-attended.

Sessions

Since then, SSAC has been offering casual Pickleball sessions for \$5 a person on Tuesdays from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., and Thursday afternoons from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m..

More recently, Pickleball has also been running on Saturdays from 9.30 a.m. to 11.30 a.m..

"The competition takes place from the comfort of the indoor basketball court," Cr Hyslop said.

"It's wonderful to see the sport taking off in our own backyard given it is perfect for people of all ages.

"I've watched a few matches myself and have seen the enjoyment it brings people from all walks of life, despite their physical abilities, background or exposure to playing sport in the past."

St. Arnaud?

The emerging popularity of SSAC's Pickleball program has led to council investigating the opportunity of rolling out the sport in St Arnaud and other locations in the shire.

Cr Hyslop said it had also spurred momentum for launching a formal competition.

"There are several social players coming every week who are wanting a try a formalised competitive program now they understand how the game is played," Cr Hyslop said.

"This would be the first of its kind in our region."

Cr Hyslop urged anyone interested in participating in a formal Pickleball competition to fill out an online expression of interest form.

"The beauty of the sport is that it's extremely social and easy to play, there are no barriers to picking up a bat and ball and giving it a go," she said.

All Ages

"We have juniors through to people in their twilight years participating and playing together, which is a fantastic result given the program is still in its infancy in our shire.

"Even if you're yet to give the game a try, if you are considering participating, we would love you to fill out a form."

People can visit <https://ngsc.elementorg.com/eoi-ssac-pickleball-competition/> to fill out an expression of interest, which includes nominating preferred days and times should a competition come to fruition. People can call (03) 5358 0550 for more information. Registrations close at 5 p.m. on Sunday, April 27.



Winners, Donald: Alison McEwen, Luke Kelly, Ian (Tiger) McEwen, Norm Hollis.



Runners-up, Donald Golf: Bill Livingston, Tony Dionisopoulos, Geoff Rigby, Stewart Hollis.



Third place, Boort: John Gibson, Dot Gibson, Greg Carrol, Lynne Carrol.

Commitment to Gender Equality:

• Continued from page 1.

Association of Australia (Victorian Division), provided good insight into the important role of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals are an agenda for providing peace and prosperity for all people and our planet and they underpin the work of Neighbourhood Houses all across Australia.

They are interlinked goals capturing almost every aspect of life, recognising that we must take a holistic approach to eradicate poverty, alleviate all socio-economic and environmental deprivations including combatting climate change.

Gender equality has a standalone goal within this agenda, while also appearing across many of the other goals as a cross-cutting priority, critical to driving success in health, education and economic growth.

In her address, Sophie showcased how we can't bring into being the sustainable society we want, and our sprouting dreams won't grow, without gender equality.

We know that women continue to experience economic inequality, workplace discrimination, under representation in leadership, higher risks of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking and health inequality, but we are making progress.

Encouragingly a thirty year old woman today (born in developed countries), has significantly more opportunities and freedoms than their

counterparts of thirty years ago. They have greater career choices, access to education, control over their reproductive health, leadership roles, freedom to express themselves, both online and offline, and they can challenge traditional gender roles and expectations.

A woman born thirty years ago is also much more likely to have financial independence, more opportunities to travel independently and pursue their own interests and passions, as well as stronger legal protections against discrimination and violence.

In concluding Sophie highlighted that we still have work to do, and we all have a role to play, including men, noting that "it's not a competition between genders, but a collective step forward. When women are included, empowered, and given equal opportunities, society as a whole thrives."

Positive Change in the Community

Guest speaker Fabian Dattner challenged the group to be brave and step into roles that drive meaningful change, noting that it's a "short life and a long universe".

Fabian is the co-founder of Homeward Bound, an initiative which sends women leaders in STEMM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Medicine) to Antarctica for immersive leadership training.

Through Homeward Bound she demonstrated that the world needs more diverse voices in decision-making

and ethical leadership which requires courage, self-awareness, and a willingness to be held accountable.

Nine Things

Fabian focused on the 9 things needed "to make stuff happen". These included being clear on the why, your values and your strategy. Find people who can do what you can't, share your thinking, delegate, measure output, expect things to go wrong and review, revise and go again.

She implored everyone present to listen carefully, build trust, and empower others, creating environments where teams thrive together rather than individuals succeeding at the expense of others. "The crazy is made possible by the first follower".

Teamwork

Fabian highlighted the value of teamwork with a quick exercise on one attendee wish, Mary McLoughlan said she wanted to play Pickleball in Charlton. From this one comment, Fabian gathered seven people on stage who all thought they could help make this a reality. By the end of the day more people in the room had shared their solutions with Mary, which showcased how quickly an idea can come to fruition.

Fabian concluded by saying, "Your presence here today, supporting a local event, shows true collaboration. It is a sign of care, standing shoulder to shoulder with your neighbours from all different backgrounds and together as a team, you can

make volumes of difference and achieve exceptional outcomes."

The Panel

One of the day's highlights was the panel session featuring four inspirational young women who thoughtfully answered questions posed by host Jo Postlethwaite. Adding a dynamic touch, Jo adopted a game-style approach to engage both the panellists and the audience, making the discussions even more interactive and insightful.

Biographies of all the panel speakers were included in the day's program and guests were encouraged to take them home to read, as the whole time allocation for the panel session could have been taken up highlighting the incredible achievements of the panel members.

Three of the four panel speakers, Hayley O'Callaghan (nee Warne), Monique Watts and Jenna Allan (Nee McNicol) all grew up and completed their education in the Buloke Shire at Birchip, Charlton and Wycheproof respectively, and the fourth member of the panel, Bec Phillips, was also raised in a rural community, on a dairy farm where she was the only Aboriginal student in her school.

Bec's passion is for her culture and country and she has been working on the revival of her traditional language Dja Dja Wurrung, through Djalli Bunjil (Language Knowledge) and reviving traditional and modern day songs and dances for her

people. Among other roles Bec is an artist and creative, focused on her evolving culture and the chair of Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation, trading as DJAARA.

Associate Professor Monique Watts is a senior cardiologist at Victoria Heart, The Alfred Hospital and Epworth Hospital and an Associate Professor at the University of Melbourne. Monique has established a regular cardiac clinic at East Wimmera Health Service and is a strong advocate for women's cardiac health. Monique did remind attendees that heart disease is the biggest killer of women globally and it is a good idea for women over 45 to get a full Heart Health Check.

Jenna Allan was born and raised in Wycheproof and is currently Director Corporate and Organisational Performance at Buloke Shire Council following a diverse career path. Jenna studied a Bachelor of Applied Science (Property) at RMIT University and completed a traineeship with the Valuer General Victoria before becoming a qualified Property Valuer. After moving back to Wycheproof and the birth of her first baby Jenna has held a variety of positions in Buloke, including Manager of the Wyche Resource Centre, Capital Project Officer and Manager of Community Development at the Buloke Shire Council, and a Project Co-ordinator, Stakeholder Engagement at BCG.

Hayley O'Callaghan is an ex-student of Birchip P-12

School and a former elite netballer, who represented Australia. Hayley is currently the People & Culture Business Partner at Hawthorn Football Club, working closely with senior leadership across key areas including talent development, engagement, risk and compliance, and organisational design.

Prior to joining Hawthorn, Hayley held leadership roles across elite sport and corporate sectors, including General Manager of People & Culture at Melbourne Rebels Rugby Union and senior HR positions at Bendigo and Adelaide Bank, Rural Finance and General Electric

Advice

Amongst the answers these impressive young women provided to the audience, were some key messages that included advice such as: "Keep turning up!", "bring curiosity to the table", "be seen, stand up and be heard" and "keep planting the seed, because the seeds grow".

All the panellists admitted to experiencing moments of doubt, times when they questioned whether they truly belonged in the spaces they occupied, which is often referred to as imposter syndrome and can be a significant barrier to success.

The women provided some insight into how they overcome this mindset including tips like "recognising that everyone has something of value to give and acknowledging that you are exactly

• Continued on page 13.



• The inspiring panel speakers: Bec Phillips, Jenna Allan, Monique Watts, Hayley O'Callaghan.



• Wendy Watts, Kerry Barker, Carol Kemp, Kaylene James, Jan Elder.



• Rhonda Allan (Mallee Sports Assembly), guest speaker Fabian Dattner with organiser and chair of Charlton Neighbourhood House Kaylene Cossar and Panel Host Jo Postlethwaite.



• Jade Benham MP and Anne Durie chat with guest speaker Fabian Dattner.

Women Assemble at Charlton Park

• Continued from page 12.

where you need to be and there is no one that can do it any better than you at that exact moment”.

They also said, “Knowing how to manage fear against imposter system” is important and “Acknowledge imposter syndrome, own it and move on”.

Whether in leadership, parenthood, or their personal life, the women highlighted that showing up and taking action is what truly defines them. Leadership is not about waiting for permission; it’s about stepping forward with confidence and recognizing your intrinsic skills.

Their advice to “Dream big and go after it”, “Not be limited by what other people say or what you think they’ll say”,

“you are only limited by you”, “don’t underestimate how important you can be” and “be comfortable with you are” particularly resonated with the young people present.

A heartwarming aspect of the panel was the honesty and genuine gratitude the panellists felt for their hometown. They all acknowledged the collective contributions that their teachers, coaches, families and fellow community members had made in their successful journeys.

They were thankful they had grown up in multifaceted, multi-skilled communities where there were no barriers. Everyone did their bit, worked hard and had a strong sense of community and resilience. They highlighted the powerful people in the room and the

influence that many of them had had on them and were continuing to have on other young people in their respective communities.

Everyone who attended left excited for the future, knowing that everyone experiences different challenges and makes different mistakes. But we can all learn from our own mistakes and other people’s mistakes without judgement, and we can all grow and achieve amazing things together.

The take home message was how much power there is in sharing ideas, working together, not tearing others down and being supportive, not competitive. Together we can all succeed and achieve the goal, “Empowered Women. Resilient Communities.”

Thank You’s

The event was hosted by the Buloke Neighbourhood House Cluster and organised by the Charlton Neighbourhood House and Wycheproof House and Wycheproof Resource Centre.

In addition to all the speakers and panellists, who were presented with a gift bag of locally sourced produce, emcee and cluster lead, Simone Christie, made a special thank you to Kaylene Cossar, president of the Charlton Neighbourhood House and Charlton and Wycheproof co-ordinators Cathie Hobbs and Marnie Durie, for their innovation and hard work in making the day such a success.



• Guest Speaker Sophie Arnold.

Simone acknowledged the financial partners who supported the event including the Australian Government, Victorian Government, Buloke Shire Council, Buloke Women’s Network, Mallee Neighbourhood House Network, Charlton Community Bendigo Bank, and Buloke & Northern Grampians Landcare,



• Maree Sands, Kim Westerland.

and thanked them for investing in the work of the Buloke Neighbourhood Houses.

And most importantly, a big thank you was extended to everyone who attended and demonstrated their commitment to building “Empowered Women. Resilient Communities”.

Attendees were encouraged to share the stories they heard at the event in their homes, workplaces, sporting clubs and in community settings. These conversations will ensure the vision set forth in Beijing thirty years ago will continue to pave the way for more girls and women to have incredible stories to share.



• Cousins Anne Warne and Glender Warne catch up.



• Kaitlyn Hunter, Carly Parish, Kelly Brown, Georgia Brown, Sharon Nicholls, Rochelle Amos.



• Val Bourke, Hayley and Isobel Soulsby.



• Grace McKersie, Isobel Soulsby, Emmy Nelson, Hayley O’Callaghan (nee Warne), Monique Watts, Annie Olive, Poppy Fitzpatrick, Ella McKersie.



• Andrea Coatsworth, Nutheera White, Dawn Hommelhoff, Shirleen Noonan, Joy Morrison.



• John Cossar and Dan McLoughlan.

Top Turnout for Birchip Tennis:

The Birchip Tennis Club hosted its annual Club Championships Day on Sunday, marking the biggest turnout in the club’s history.

Thirty matches were played across the afternoon, in glorious Autumn sunshine, which provided great viewing and entertainment.

“A” grade
In the men’s draw, Dale Hinkley secured his first “A” grade title in a hard-fought final against Jon Haslam. The section featured eight players, with Jon overcoming Robbie Lee and Josh Hamilton to reach the final, while Dale triumphed over Dave Ferrier and Russell Christie. In a gripping final, both players showcased skill and determination, with Dale narrowly edging out Jon, 8-7, in a contest filled with intense rallies.

In the women’s division, Fiona Best and De Ferrier faced off in a familiar grand final showdown. Fiona advanced by defeating Julie Coffey and Carling McEvoy, while De earned her spot with victories over Kelly Haslam and Steph Coffey. Fiona staged a remarkable comeback from 2-7 down, fighting point by point to close the gap. However, De remained composed under pressure, ultimately securing the title with an 8-6 victory, dethroning

the defending champion in an exciting finish.

“B” Grade
Blake Lee emerged victorious in the men’s “B” grade final, defeating Des Coffey 8-2. Earlier in the day, Des secured wins over Matt Rickard and Ben Samuel, while Blake overcame Eddie Rickard and George Addis in well-contested matches.

The women’s “B” grade final saw Asha Lee take on Beau Haslam. With only four competitors in the section, Asha was victorious against Georgie Warne, while Beau defeated Zoya Rickard. Asha claimed the championship with an 8-5 victory over Beau.

“C” Grade
The boys’ “C” grade section featured a round-robin format with three players. Archie Tyler demonstrated his skill, defeating Sammy Ferrier and Oscar Sharp in matches filled with long rallies, earning him a promotion to “B” grade.

The largest division of the day, the “C” grade girls’ section, saw seven competitors battle it out. Sienna Richmond defeated Lucy Coffey to earn her spot in the final, while Frankie McClelland was vic-

torious against Ari Richmond and Gemma Tynan. In a tightly contested final, Frankie McClelland overcame Sienna Richmond in a thrilling tiebreaker, 6-5.

Acknowledgments
Following the day’s matches, players and supporters gathered for a barbecue before club president Robbie Lee delivered his closing remarks. He thanked the club’s dedicated volunteers, highlighting the efforts of selectors, Steph Coffey and Fiona Best, who did a great job in selecting two very even teams; secretary Georgie Warne, who secured significant funding for the club; vice president Tim McClelland, and treasurer Julie Coffey. Special thanks were also given to Russell Christie for maintaining the courts, Jon Haslam for lining the courts, Kelly Haslam for organising the drinks each week, as well as the volunteers who put in countless hours of work to ensure the success of social events.

A Bright Future for Birchip Tennis
Robbie emphasised the importance of junior participation, celebrating the club’s family-friendly environment and inviting new members to join.

“The future of tennis looks bright in Birchip with our large number of junior players,” he said.
“If you have young children, the Birchip Tennis Club is the place to be.”
The Club Championships capped off a highly successful season for the Birchip Tennis Club, which saw both teams reach the finals and the Birchip team progress to the grand final. Off the court, the club also hosted popular events, including the Italian Dinner and Quiz Night, further strengthening its vibrant community spirit.



• Championship winners, left to right: Blake Lee (men’s “B” grade), Asha Lee (women’s “B” grade), Dale Hinkley (men’s “A” grade), Frankie McClelland (girls’ “C” grade), De Ferrier (women’s “A” grade), Archie Tyler (boys’ “C” grade).



• Dale Hinkley.



• Asha Lee.



• De Ferrier.



• Frankie McClelland.

Club Championships Decided



• Sienna Richmond.



• Jon Haslam.



• Fiona Best.

Narrewillock Wins Krakajak Triples

Narrewillock triples team of Doug Finlay, Marty (Bluey) McGeown and Cher Brien (Noddy Out Cher In) has defeated the YYY Men in the semi final 12 shots to 5 to progress to play the Triers team of Dale Cook, Wayne Roberts and Mark Hamley, who defeated the Townies in their semi final, 10 shots to 4.

The final was hard fought with the Triers losing 11 shots in three ends, but then won the next four ends to be 5 shots to 11 down with one end to play, Narrewillock winning a comfortable 12 shots to 5.

Section two was won by the All Stars team of Rhys Gahan, Rod Heritage and Wayne Southwell defeating the Farmers team of Greg

Barnard, Isaac Bourke and Julie Bourke, 11 shots to 3.

Section three winners were the View Street team of Stuart James, Corey Fanning and Dan Whykes, defeating the Legends team of Jenny Walsh, Zac Irwin and Brad Chester, 14 shots to 3.

The glasses for the night were won by the Flintstones

team of Isaac Roberts, Steve Harper and Greg Wain with 16 shots in the glasses game, against the Funbags team of Bronwyn Fisher, Tamara Brown and Jodie Quinn.

Thank you to the sponsors A P Earthmoving for assisting since 2015 and the offer to continue into the future, Aaron Watts was present on the evening.



• Winners, Narrewillock: Doug Finlay, Cher Brien, Bluey McGowen.



• Section 2 winners, All Stars: Rodney Heritage, Wayne Southwell, Rhys Gahan.



• Section 3 winners, View Street, Corey Fanning, Dan Whykes, Stuart James.

Comeback for Charlton Basketball

Basketball has made a comeback in Charlton over the summer!

The Charlton Basketball Association's Women's Competition has not officially run since 2018. However, in October of 2024, 38 women signed up and allowed the competition to return with five teams of eager basketballers. It has been fantastic to see so many new players embracing the sport and lots of returning players keen to participate again.

On Monday, March 17, the finals were played at the Charlton Stadium, with the top four teams fighting for a spot in the grand final. The Purple team finished on the top of the ladder and faced off against Green in a fast and fiery game. Purple outscored its opposition and won its place in the grand final. The second game saw Orange play a high scoring game against Blue. Orange was victorious, sending it along to the big dance.

The grand final was played out on Monday, March 24, and before the first jump, the crowd was uncertain of which team was going to be crowned the winner.

The game started off fast and evenly matched. Both teams were putting up shots and collecting rebounds, but no one was able to convert a score for the opening few minutes. Orange captain, Chloe Walsh, was fighting for

her team and her efforts resulted in five quick fouls and being sent off in the first fifteen minutes.

Orange was left with four players for the remainder of the game, and youngsters Taylah Boyle and Sarah Blair picked up the momentum and kept the pressure on in their defensive half.

Isabel Soulsby was strong for Purple, grabbing rebounds and sending the ball to Abby Mulquiny and Claudia Lee to shoot long bombs and grow their team's lead.

The pressure from Orange in response was impressive but Purple was just too strong in the end and defeated Orange, 26 – 11.

After the game the competition co-ordinators, Brooke Thompson and Abby Mulquiny, thanked all players and supporters for their enthusiasm and participation throughout the season. The Purple team was then presented with premiership medallions by their captain, Claudia Lee.

Weekly umpire, Lara Thompson, awarded Sarah Blair the "Best on Court" medallion for her hardworking game and countless intercepts. Lara played a significant role in the revival of the competition; the games throughout the season would not have been possible to run

without her weekly commitment to umpiring. The "Most Improved" award was presented to Taylah Boyle as her confidence and skills grew immensely throughout the duration of the season.

The MVP was awarded to joint winners, Megan Bruns and Brooke Thompson, with the runner-up going to Remi Jeffery.

Orange captain, Chloe Walsh, thanked Brooke, Abby and Lara for their organisation and dedication to restarting the local competition and expressed how enjoyable it was for all involved. Overall, it was a fantastic season and the Charlton Basketball Association is looking forward to seeing everyone return at the end of the year.

• *Top right: Claudia Lee dribbles the ball at defender Taylah Boyle, umpire Lara Thompson watches on.*

• *Right: Purple team, left to right: Lila Schofield, Maggie Riley, Isabel Soulsby, Katie Lewis, Abby Mulquiny and Claudia Lee.*

• *Bottom right: Award winners, left to right: Taylah Boyle (Most Improved), Sarah Blair (Best on Court), Brooke Thompson (MVP), Megan Bruns (MVP). Absent Remi Jeffery (Runner-up MVP).*



• *Orange team, left to right: Taylah Boyle, Kaitlyn Pollock, Sarah Blair, Zoe Carney and Chloe Walsh.*

