

Grassroots Information – Buchan Meeting – Oct 2018

As well as from the more populated areas of Bairnsdale, Paynesville and Lindenow, the East Gippsland Community Action Group has members in Mallacoota, Benambra, Orbost, and Buchan. One of its members, Matt Stephenson who is now standing as an Independent Candidate for Gippsland East has been travelling across the shire to hear issues of most concern. At Buchan there were several members of EGCAG present with people from Canni Creek, Gelantipy, The Basin, Tooloo Arm and South Buchan.

The drought was a major concern but highlighted other issues impacting on primary production. The extraordinary shire rate impost on farmers was discussed at length with examples given of huge Council rate rises from the previous year. Some farm properties had risen by 12% and 20%, and 80%, while Bill and Sandra Livingstone's had risen by a crippling 98%

Sandra Livingstone presented a discussion paper quoting rating systems in countries which value food production – as England where only the residential dwelling and buildings close by are rated, not broad acres and farm improvements as in Australia. Here rates are struck on sale potential and are unrelated to income or services received from the shire.

It was felt that much of the drought relief being promised by governments would be absorbed in bureaucratic cost. Farmers suggested a more direct and effective response would be for State and Federal Governments to fund shires to give rate reductions to all farming properties. Another related suggestion was for Council to waive the Livestock Exchange fees during the drought period. Currently the shire gains a hefty profit from all stock sales.

Appreciation was expressed for the drought response of volunteer groups, in effect doing what governments should be doing.

Other discussion: Shire Council lack of transparency and engagement with constituents is a concern with decisions being worked out in closed briefing sessions; also councillor's mail opened and responded to by staff. It was felt that there was no longer means of the public directly interacting with the Council except in tightly controlled situations.

Social and mental issues were discussed: Ambulance response is inadequate for the Buchan district and has been known to take hours.

Feral deer have increased in numbers, impacting seriously on drought stricken properties. It was suggested that the government encourage more culling and that

this be developed as a pet food industry using mobile meat vans. Deer are now so plentiful they are even eating out residential gardens in the main street.

Blackberries have become an increasing pest across bush land and waterways. It was felt that over many years there has been too much emphasis on willow eradication while blackberries are a far more invasive species.

An area of concern for the Buchan township has been the shutting down of camping sites in the Buchan Caves Reserve. Once this area had provided a great many sites where families camped for days. This had resulted in economic benefit to businesses in the town. Now, despite around 100,00 tourists visiting the Buchan Caves every year, they come as day trippers with little flow on benefit to the town. One resident said, " We need to get rid of Melbourne decision making. We need the Caves Reserve like it used to be - to be part of revitalization of the town."

Clearly there are many areas needing community action across East Gippsland , particularly a need for more locally-informed leadership.