

Investing in a local future

A made-to-measure decentralisation project where everyone wins writes Paul Cockram

UP THE BACK of this issue of *BWD* is my Time & Energy article on the great political divide. A divorce not between ideologies, but between what government says and what it does.

Here though, is a chance for us to put to our politicians (and I'm a very minor one) the idea of, "put your money where your mouth is". Or in this case, put your grant allocation where your press release says it is. I'm referring to the Braidwood truck wash and the 'viability' of the saleyards. Without going into the full story of how we got to this point, the immediate problem is that the truck wash has been closed.

This is causing enormous grief for the cattle truck operators and regardless of whose fault is the sudden closure, it surely is not theirs. They are the victims of the all too frequent game of inter-governmental 'duck-for-cover'.

It seems that the compliance rules for

truck washes and saleyards have changed in the last ten years and nobody much noticed — or wanted to notice. In this particular case, the NSW Office of Water has informed council that it will not issue a licence to operate the Braidwood truck wash in its current state.

Worse still, it's put the focus on whether the saleyards too have kept up with modern best practice. As they are, the saleyards are a viable enterprise, but if hundreds of thousands of dollars are required to modernise them, that is a quite different story.

An all-too-common approach to things these days is to start with the rules and the money and let that determine what services the community can have. Then, when we do consult the community, it's more about big picture wish lists than specific, currently available infrastructure coming under threat.

This is where we're at now with the Braidwood truck wash and saleyards.

So let's start from the other angle and agree that both these enterprises are vital and fundamental parts of our region's economy and identity. The cattle industry is a large part of Braidwood's reason for being.

Having agreed on that, the question then is: how are we going to pay the ongoing costs of keeping up with modern best practice? This is where we can challenge the politicians to match what they say with what they do.

Just released is the *NSW Government Response to the Decentralisation Taskforce Report*. In the government's own words: "The Decade of Decentralisation is the Government's policy vision for regional economic development in NSW".

"Key components of the Government's decentralisation policy agenda include:

- actively pursuing strategies and policies to encourage decentralisation — steady and strategic growth in regions;
- ensuring the services people need to make regional living attractive and viable are available and of high quality;
- giving increased local decision-making and participation to regional communities;
- providing infrastructure to increase the productivity and build the capacity of regional economies to grow."

These laudable initiatives come from the office of the Deputy Premier and leader of the Nationals, the Hon Andrew Stoner. They sound custom-made to preserve the decentralised nature of Braidwood's rural economy.

So this is what I hope can happen. The truck wash will reopen and the saleyards will be assured of a future. There is no point in the government having grand plans to encourage decentralisation if it does not support currently viable and vibrant local industries.

Braidwood needs its saleyards and associated infrastructure to support local farmers and to ensure that agriculture remains part of this region's social and economic fabric.

We got our second zebra crossing as a result of a strong community demonstration of support, backed up by solid reasoning. We can do it again.

Who knows? The notion that a community knows best what it needs and wants — and that all levels of government should work to make it happen — might actually catch on and become a strategy for creating a better tomorrow.



Kevin O'Dwyer's War — 4

THERE AREN'T TOO MANY WW2 VETERANS STILL WITH US

Queen of the Cosplay — 7

THERE ARE PEOPLE OUT THERE ABOUT WHOM WE NEVER THINK

Life in Braidwood — 9

THOUGH TARRY WE MAY BE, WE'VE HARRY AS YOU'LL SEE

A 'gentleman' Fire — 10

BETTER LEARNT THAN BURNT IS THE MOTTO OF THIS CAPTAIN'S TALE

Too fast to live, too young to Die — 14

A STORY ABOUT LONGING AND BELONGING

The wilful Whippet — 16

WHEN TOO MANY DANN DOG STORIES ARE NEVER ENOUGH

Byron bay writers Festival — 17

TRISH GRABBED MARTIN AND TOOK HIM NORTH

To market, to Market — 18

FARMER FRESH FOOD FOR FASTIDIOUS FOLK

A dog's life Really — 20

LIFE IN A MARKET GARDEN CAN BE A BIT SCARY

Echidnas ... what do you Know — 21

ONE OF THE CUTEST EVER CRITTERS TO WADDLE PAST

Bronwyn's garden in Summer — 23

HOLY HORTICULTURE BATMAN, IT'S BEEN OVER A YEAR ALREADY

Dialectical Disputation — 24

BCS HAS SOME WONDERFULLY ARGUMENTATIVE STUDENTS

Let the Land Speak — 25

MAGGIE REVIEWS A NEW JACKIE FRENCH BOOK

A tale of two Studios — 26

HOME IS WHERE THE ART IS

Fire cadets 2013 — 28

ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL BATCH OF TOMORROW'S FIREYS

What's wrong with our Farmers? — 30

CHEMICAL COMPANIES, WAGES, LOW RETURNS, BANKS, THE WEATHER ...

Curling up with a good Book — 32

MISS RUBY'S HAS READING PLEASURE FOR EVERYONE

Your future in the stars & the Crossword — 34

Time & Energy — 35

"BUT I DON'T WANT TO GO AMONG MAD PEOPLE," ALICE REMARKED

CAN YOU BELIEVE it's been more than a year since the first issue of *BWD*? The time flies way too fast for me to produce magazines with much regularity.

So I have to admit that some of the stories in this issue I've had sitting on my computer for quite a while. The last *BWD* was the Winter edition and if you're wondering where Spring went, this is it too. We're straight into Summer.

Next year of course is Braidwood's 175th anniversary as a settler town and there'll be lots of heritage events and a parade or two. Celebrating what we've done and where we've been for the last 175 years will be a lot of fun but I hope we also give a thought to where Braidwood will be in 2188.

There are many alternative energy practioneers around these parts and while we're in a celebratory mood, it would be good to see Braidwood and environs showcasing innovative and less polluting ways of generating electricity.

I'd like to sponsor a commemorative bank note for next year. A 'Braidwood Buck' so to speak. Some town businesses have expressed support for currency-come-coupon type of idea.

Say it had a value of a dollar, its supply was controlled and authenticated by a 'town bank'. Local artists might be prevailed upon to design a set of notes, so desirable that tourists would want them in their change and shopkeepers would therefore be happy to accept one as part of the bill.

If anyone else thinks the idea might fly, come up with a more original name than Braidwood Buck. All suggestions are welcome.

And please, keep the stories coming. Many of you have great yarns to tell and cupboards stuffed with remarkable photographs and paraphernalia of yesteryear.

The *BWD* office is out the back of Miss Ruby's Bookshop, opposite the Chemist, and if you don't find me there, ring me on 0417 459 775.

Paul Cockram

ON THE COVER THIS ISSUE: RFS CADET BRIANA JENKINS STEPPING UP AS PART OF A FIVE 'MAN' FOG ATTACK.

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