

The Manning Community News

SEPTEMBER 2023

SHARING COMMUNITY NEWS AND VIEWS

FREE

This paper is being published as a community service to provide readers with factual and independent coverage of news, people and events in our district.
If you have a story idea please contact us. PO BOX 7, WINGHAM NSW 2429 editor@manningcommunitynews.com



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HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS. . . .

... and home can be many things.

It's more than a roof over one's head. It's a sense of security, of belonging to a place and people, a happy space, a place of memories.

My grandfather lived in a tent while he built a modest Federation house in the 1920s in Wingham. My grandmother, my mother and her baby sister, went home to England to visit the rellies for the first time since she'd married and come to Australia.

Quietly, one time, Poppy told me that his time in his tent had been a time of peace and hope and joy looking to finally settle in a home with his family. (He and great grandad had worked on the railways so always moving.) But of course he said he'd never say that to my grandmother!

We live in different times indeed. Finding, let alone affording, a place to live these days is scary and expensive. The long lines of potential renters on Saturday showings is very telling. A home of one's own can be a far off dream. Home ownership can be

a crisis of paying off an exploding mortgage.

Solutions are difficult, and no one is happy. Tower blocks like stacked cages in a hen coop, crammed city dwellings that stretch towards the mountains or the coast with little if any amenities like public transport, or public recreation areas, a library or shops or cafes, turn into sprawling islands of loneliness. How do you meet people, socialise and function in such crowded isolation?

And in rural areas, good agricultural land, koala habitat and forests are being cleared for cheerless,

treeless, cheek by jowl housing estates.

There has to be a better way, apart from less people. So before tackling the construction of new homes, there is an immediate solution for at least one sector away from cities and suburbia.

However, as usual, the bleeding obvious is being ignored and buried under red tape.

It's Tiny Homes, whether they be a converted motorhome or a tiny house on wheels.

Then there's existing homes that were built in the time long, long ago before bureaucracy got in the way.

Midcoast Council insists on demolishing homes that were built prior to the red tape era. Never mind that some are very attractive, some a bit thrown together, but meet all needs including looking after their own sewerage, water and power. They have chooks and veggies and owners who like it that way.

I received the following email from a fellow living outside Lismore.

"Over the past few years I have put my heart

Some moveable homes are on the larger side and meet legal road requirements (and hence can be registered as caravans, fitting within those parameters). (Tiny Tect Tiny Houses www.tinytect.com.au)



Poppy and a visitor to his "happy tent"

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and soul into restoring an old banana shed. This has been my home on and off for the past 4 years.

Before the flood in early 2021 I joined the Byron Shire Council's amnesty moratorium on unapproved housing in the shire.

This was aimed at assisting tiny homes such as mine to "go legal" and avoid potential punitive actions later down the track. One month into the amnesty, council cancelled this approach citing it to be a failure and compliance officers were told to apologise to residents for the way they went about handling the task of the amnesty.

The worst part of this is that council used the amnesty forms later as information to send punitive actions, orders and fines to residents. (This alone has cost me upwards of \$5,000 in fines.)

Since being sent a non habitation order post the flood we engaged the help of ex-town planner Ray Darney to submit a DA for us. This DA process has cost us \$10K to date with no end in sight. Ray has been appalled at how council compliance have treated him and ourselves throughout this process and has since removed himself from being our town planner saying the council people don't speak sense any more.

This attempt at a DA and honouring our initial commitment to the now long-gone amnesty has been to no avail and I have since been sent an order to demolish my home.

This home is at least 20+ years older than myself and arguably constructed in 1946 after WW2. To tell me to demolish this beautiful home at the end of a 100acre block, post the largest flood and housing crisis in living memory is truly bureaucracy gone mad. This is unethical.

At this stage we can not, and will not, demolish the house. There is no where to move to, and we do not have the financial capacity to either move the house, demolish the house, or move our family elsewhere. We also cannot afford to do nothing, as we risk huge financial punishment for non compliance. I have friends and neighbours in the same position with council who have also been sent demolition orders etc. It is worrisome to think that this is happening not only to myself but also to many long term residents of this area who are not as mentally and financially stable as myself, not to mention the PTSD post the largest flood in living memory."

(Frankly, having lived for many

years in the Byron Shire, demolishing "unauthorised" homes would wipe out all of Nimbin, and half the areas around Mullumbimby and surrounds! Ed)

Surely there is a better way to co-exist with unregulated homes to see that they meet safety requirements etc. These tend to be people who want to live off the grid, close to nature. They are better neighbours than a bunch of neo Nazi right wing extremists or bikie gangs who have hideaways in the scrub.

Further north there is a woman who owns and lives on 40 acres who shares her land with three women . . . two are older, one single with a young son. They live in attractive mobile/Tiny Homes amongst trees and views. Each is some distance (a walk away) from the other for privacy, but they get together on occasion round a campfire to talk and socialise. They feel protected and safe. They pay the owner, whom they regard as a good friend, a small rent from their pension so they are not "sponging off the taxpayer."

They have solar for heat, water tanks, individual grey water sewerage system, they take out their own garbage. They shop locally. The son goes to a local school and says he has mum and three grannies.

But this paradise further north is under a cloud as the council make life difficult instead of saying, how great is this!

TINY HOMES MANUFACTURE BOOMS

There is an abundance of Tiny Homes for sale even on local Facebook pages. They range in price, but offer an immediate solution as granny flats or family/friend/tenant accommodation. How many properties in the midnorth coast would be willing to have a Tiny Home somewhere on their property? Like any tenant potential tiny home owners can be checked out.

But Red Tape binds things up so much, most people give up. Here's what came back from the Media Advisor to MidCoast Council Director Mr Paul DeSzell -

What is the Council policy if home owners want to put a tiny house on their property?

Tiny house developments rules are provided by the state government. Tiny homes can be approved under the development planning and moveable dwelling (caravan) legislation.

The approval requirements depend on the type of tiny house you consider and the zoning of the land it's situated.

They have to seek Council permission don't they? Is that a fast decision by Council considering the housing crises currently.

A property owner that wants to place a tiny home on a property to offer as rental accommodation will need to obtain both a development consent and approval as an activity under Section 68 of the Local Government Act 1993 (LG Act).

Also, as a manufactured home and moveable dwelling fall within the definition of 'relocatable home' they must satisfy the relevant provisions of the Local Government (Manufactured Home Estates, Caravan Parks, Camping Grounds and Moveable Dwellings) Regulation 2021.

The process takes the same time as is does to approve a single house.

If permission is granted what does it cost the rate payer/home owner to obtain? If the tiny house is put there to obtain rent does that complicate things? Tiny houses are sought for elderly family members, like a granny flat, so do the same restrictions, if any, apply?

The costs will vary and we recommend anyone interested in this to contact Council for an estimate.

Rental or short term letting of any tiny house will be one of the questions asked in the approval process. Council may seek additional information from a property owner during the assessment process.

For family accommodation purposes, there are some exemptions. If a tiny house is to be provided to accommodate a member of your home, there must be an approved existing dwelling already on your property, and the tiny home must meet the Local Government (Manufactured Home

Estates, Caravan Parks, Camping Grounds and Moveable Dwellings) Regulation 2021.

We recommend anyone wanting to accommodate a family member in a caravan speak contact Council to discuss their situation.

If permission is obtained by Council to put in a tiny house, can solar power and water tanks and septic systems be used instead of town utilities.

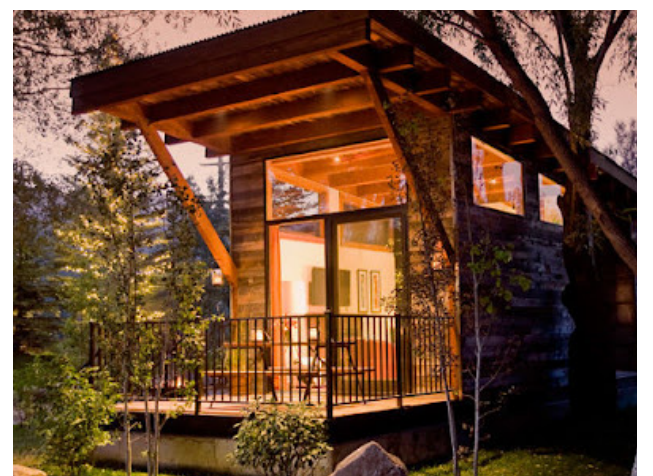
As part of the application process, Council will require the owner to indicate how that will provide a safe and health conditions, which in those circumstances where town water and sewer and power is available, we would request that an approved tiny home have access to these directly.

Of course Council would prefer the rates for their empty coffers.

We have to start thinking outside the square meterage of a treeless block with virtually no backyard and neighbours in hand touch vicinity.

Locally the homeless list is growing, domestic violence and crime is on the increase in difficult and constrained times. Maybe we have to go back and look at the innovative housing program Wingham once did. Or else, unfold the ole khaki tent.

DM.



VOTE YES . . . IT MAKES SENSE

Cast your mind back some six years, when over 250 Indigenous delegates met at Uluru and reached a consensus on a 440 word statement now known as 'The Uluru Statement from the Heart'.

The Uluru Statement was adopted in full by the Labor Party. After winning the 2022 election, the party planned for a referendum in late 2023. (A referendum was required as the Statement specifically asked for a First Nations Voice to be enshrined in the constitution.) On cue, the National party rejected the Statement and endorsed a 'NO' vote - but it was the decision of the Liberals to join them that has the nation so divided. To quote Thomas Mayo, a signatory to the Uluru Statement, "the trolls are well and truly off the chain".

Some Liberals like Julian Leaser and Bridget Archer were so bewildered to be caught on the wrong side of history they took action. Leaser resigned from the frontbench of the Liberal opposition on a matter of principle: "I want my children to be able to say, 'Our father stood up for something he believes in,'" he explained. Bridget Archer stated, "If you consult with people who are affected by the decisions you make, you get a better outcome."

What are the trolls objecting to in this proposal that has been gleaned from dialogues held across Australia, involving a robust sample of First Nations communities (note 'communities', not individuals). In a genuine dialogue, everyone wins - the opposite of the adversarial party politics of government. Why is the Voice so important and non-negotiable? It is because of the endemic, generational, structural problems that spring from not being heard. As the late Yunupingu said, "....parliamentarians and bureaucrats do not listen because they do not have to."

It was the lie of terra nullius from colonial times that underpinned the legal system of land ownership, and foreshadowed the protracted struggles to recognise Native Title. Come Federation, Aborigines were excluded, White Australian sentiments were riding high, and all agreed Aborigines were a dying race. By 1967, a referendum was held to put this myth to rest. The blinkers were finally removed and the survivors were counted.

Royal Commissions have come and gone. Representative bodies (NACC, NAC, ATSIC, NCAFP

- endless acronyms) were all abandoned as new governments occupied Canberra. Professor of constitutional law and one of the architects of The Voice, Megan Davis, writes in The Quarterly about the impact of telling the same story over and over and not being heard ('Voice of reason on recognition and renewal').

The Voice is essential to break the ritual failure of addressing Indigenous issues. This ritualism involves accepting the legitimacy of goals whilst losing focus on the best way to achieve them. Consider the farcical yearly review of 'Closing the Gap', followed by the repeated lamentation of 'no change'. Royal Commissions end up on the shelf, and recommendations are ignored in the climate of conservatism. Remember how quickly Malcolm Turnbull shelved the Statement, revealing the impotence of genuine liberals up against the hard Right?

PLEASE REMEMBER: THE ULURU STATEMENT WAS ISSUED NOT TO A PRIME MINISTER, BUT TO THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE, AS AN INVITATION TO JOIN WITH INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

TO ASK THE GOVERNMENT TO LISTEN.

What a rallying call! Many volunteers are out letter boxing, manning stalls, door knocking and café crawling. All this restores my faith in our capacity to do the right thing. Over 70 years ago when Menzies asked Australians to ban the Communist Party, we voted 'no', because political freedom was guaranteed in the constitution. Fifty years ago, we voted to include our First Nation people. Now, it is time to listen. And time to get proactive: contact YES23 for a publicity package, talk to people, set up a stall.

Thomas Mayo wants us to ask ourselves: how will we feel admitting to the next generation that the likes of Peter Dutton, Pauline Hanson and Barnaby Joyce were right - that the Australian people just didn't have the courage and generosity to acknowledge our Indigenous heritage, and dignify it with The Voice? How ashamed would we be?

Maggie O'Sullivan

(First published in *The Inklings*)

SHARK SPOTTER SUPREME ON THE WAY?

I checked in with a friend I hadn't been in touch with for a bit as he always has something interesting to tell me.

Ric Richardson is an old family friend and one time neighbour in Byron Bay.

Ric is an inventor extraordinaire. (He is the Australian inventor who took on Microsoft and eventually won after a painful and protracted battle for using his technology he invented without permission or acknowledgment.)

'So what's new Ric?'

'Lidar.'

'What's that?'

'It stands for Light Detection and Ranging, and is a remote sensing method that uses light in the form of a pulsed laser to measure distances.'

'For what?'

'To detect sharks fast before they make trouble.'

'Do tell.'

'I was sitting with newly minted Byron Bay mayor Simon Richardson having some lunch and asking him if he could wave a wand, what technical problem would he like to see solved? A gentleman had just died in a [shark attack a few days before](#) and he said "Solve the shark problem" and I thought "How hard can it be?" Famous last words.

It's been 9 years since that day and I'm still only just getting my head around the issue. Looks like some folks at the CSIRO and I have broken the back of the problem but it's now

our third attempt.

Firstly I tried sonar detection. Using sonar detectors that sit just below the surface and scan for sharks near popular areas. The NSW Department of Primary Industries shared internal data that showed that sharks travel up the beach in gutters next to the sand which is all foamy broken water... impossible to use sonar for that... next I tried shadow detection looking for mature sharks facing up from the surf's sandy bottom... nah. The sensors got covered in sand almost immediately. Then came our latest breakthrough - Lidar.

I am still in the process of patenting the concept but the CSIRO has

confirmed it works in principle. Stand by for news on this front the moment we get the concept patented and validated. As a Byron local, the day we can detect sharks and give good accurate detection warnings will be a good day."

Ask and you shall receive.... this is hopefully splendid news. Ric points out shark nets are massively expensive, useless, and harmful to other species. I gather Ric's super spotter will stand on a tall pole adjacent to a beach run by solar and battery.

Fingers crossed.

DM

WALK WITH US TO VOTE YES!

Voters in Lyne, across the Manning Valley and Great Lakes from Wauchope to Wingham, Dungog to Diamond Head, Hawks Nest to Harrington, Taree to Tuncurry and every town and locality across the region

... HISTORY IS CALLING!

The Referendum will take place on Saturday 14th October 2023.

On that day voters will be asked to support the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples in the Australian Constitution by establishing a Voice to Parliament. The Voice will provide advice and represent local voices and communities from across the country.

Pat Farmer, a former Liberal MP, and ultra marathon runner who is completing a *Run for The Voice*, had a big Manning welcome over two days. He was met by locals in Taree for brekky and conversation hosted by 2 Bob Radio (FM 104.7). He then met with Forster locals later in the day, including a Q & A session in the evening. The next night Pat joined Bulahdelah locals for dinner and conversation about why he is voting Yes.

Biripi young woman Jessie Co-

chrane (Year 9, Taree High School), welcomed Pat at the Taree brekky. Jessie spoke about how the Voice could help with the need for "more support for kids at school".

Aunty Janice Poulson welcomed everybody at the Forster Neighbourhood Centre. She especially welcomed Pat to "beautiful Worimi country". She highlighted how "we have a terrific bunch of kids here and it's great to have the support for our community".

Pat has been running across the country and completes his journey at Uluru in October, where the First Nations people invited the Australian community to "walk with them in a movement of the Australian people for a better future".

People across the Lyne electorate have been responding to this invitation by volunteering, putting up posters, organising local events and activities to spread the word to support a Yes vote in a positive

respectful and hopeful way. There's been stalls at markets, park runs and road side promotions, guest speakers, leafleting, importantly lots of conversations including around the Kitchen Table and direct phone calls to voters answering their questions and giving information to help them.

On 17th September people can show their support for a Yes vote by taking part in the **Walk for the Voice in Taree**. We'll be joining walkers all across Australia as part of a national **Walk for Yes**.

New volunteers are always welcomed and needed as we work to encourage Lyne voters to vote Yes. To volunteer go to <https://www.yes23.com.au/>

[lyne_for_yes](https://www.facebook.com/manning4yes)

<https://www.facebook.com/manning4yes> email manningmanning4yes@gmail.com



WE HAVE TO BE “NATURE POSITIVE” TO SAVE WHAT’S LEFT

Former Federal Treasurer Dr Ken Henry AO, (and Manning River resident) has delivered a scathing Final Report – “The Independent Financial Review of the Biodiversity Act of 2016” to the NSW Government.

While the Act has been in operation five years Dr Henry believes it will never meet its obligations. Ecosystems aren’t adequately protected, indeed most are obsolete and no longer fit for purpose.

In an interview on ABC’s Radio National Dr Henry said “**environmental considerations have to have primacy**” for all governments. He adds that the Intergenerational Report unveiled by the Treasurer this week is an “inter-generational tragedy” for young tax payers, who will be slugged with the burden of an ageing population.

“Because it’s the young people who are going to be the workers of the future,” he said. “People who are weighed down with HECS debt, who are going to have to repay a mountain of public debt, who are dealing with the consequences of climate change ... [and] who are facing diminishing prospects of ever being able to afford a home of their own. These poor buggers are also going to be the ones who are facing ever-increasing average rates of income tax.”

Because tax brackets are not indexed to inflation, increases in nominal wages lead to increases in average taxes since a greater proportion of a worker’s pay is pushed into the highest bracket applicable to them. (Known as “bracket creep.”)

In the Review Foreword Dr Henry states –

“We started with the available evidence, consulted widely and reviewed numerous submissions.

Biodiversity is not being conserved at bioregional or State scale. The diversity and quality of ecosystems is not being maintained, nor is their capacity to adapt to change and provide for the needs of future generations being enhanced. Yet

these are the principal purposes of the legislation.

It is clear to the Review Panel that the operative provisions of the Act are incapable of supporting its objectives. Too much rests upon the operation of other pieces of legislation that have their own, competing, objectives. This has to be addressed.

... As has been recognised in many global forums over the past few years, the natural environment is now so damaged that we must commit to ‘**nature positive**’ if we are to have any confidence that future generations will have the opportunity to be as well off as we are.”

Dr Henry also said Australia’s 30 per cent company tax rate needed to be cut to match the lower levels seen abroad, arguing the current system was effectively a tariff on imported capital.

“One respect in which Australia is quite unique, is that among industrialised countries, we’re the only one that hasn’t cut its company tax rate,” he said. “What’s happened through the course of this century, thus far, is as other countries have been cutting their company tax rate ... capital inflow into the Australian economy has been declining.”

Dr Henry speculated the reason why the Treasurer, Dr Chalmers, was unwilling to cut the company tax rate was because it was the main way the federal government collected revenue from the mining sector.

The way to deal with this, Dr Henry says, is to implement a separate system for taxing mining profits. This would give the federal government scope to cut the company tax rate for other sectors of the economy.

**THE ACT IS NOT MEETING ITS
PRIMARY PURPOSE**

The Review Panel found that the present *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* is not meeting its primary purpose of maintaining a healthy, productive and resilient environment, and is never likely to do so.

Biodiversity across NSW is at risk from a range of environmental disturbances:

Clearing of native vegetation, intensifying land use, a growing population and associated infrastructure development has led to the destruction, alteration and fragmentation of habitat across the state.

The effects of climate change are being felt, and are expected to become more pronounced. Projections show that extreme weather events such as bushfires, droughts, heatwaves, storms and floods will become more frequent and severe throughout NSW. Species and ecosystems are already being impacted, limiting their ability to adapt.

Weeds are out-competing native plants and taking over large swathes of habitat, disrupting the natural balance of ecosystems and reducing species diversity.

Feral animals are competing with native wildlife for resources, overgrazing native plants, and preying on native animals.

Some of the biggest fires in NSW have occurred since 2002. The 2019–20 bushfires had a profound impact on biodiversity. Estimates suggest the fires affected more than 5 million hectares of habitat in NSW. These burnt habitats are more prone to altered fire regimes, particularly large-scale fires that burn at high intensity.

The state’s major inland river systems continue to be affected by water extraction, altered river flows, loss of connectivity and catchment changes such as altered land use and vegetation clearing. These affect water availability, river health and ecosystem integrity.

Native forest logging is damaging forest ecosystems and the habitat of native species.

In summing up, the 62 page Review states that -

“The interplay of state and national legislation and the roles and responsibilities are complex. In most cases, these intersections do not accord primacy to environmental considerations, and result in outcomes that are not consistent with, and do not support, nature positive outcomes.

Getting to nature positive will require a whole lot more government actions and accountability. Legislative reform and corresponding changes to administrative arrangements may be required to align relevant Acts with a nature positive outcome.

While not totally comprehensive, the Review Panel identified 57 examples of legislation where intersections impact biodiversity outcomes.

The full Review makes significant, comprehensive and to most of us, sensible, reading. One hopes the MidCoast Council (indeed all NSW Councils) read this Review from Dr Henry and his team and take it to heart that times are changing, that there is a new and urgent emphasis in how everyone needs to put nature first if we are to survive.

Profits, greed and brown paper bags will be of no use if we lose nature, wildlife, land, and a living. Your kids and grandchildren will not thank those responsible for playing even the smallest role in the on-going deterioration of nature and our lives. This is a desperate call to make the changes needed to save what we can that’s left. Nature rules. Ask the dinosaurs.

DM

ROAD RAGE IS EVERYWHERE

Locals in the MidCoast Council area are fed up with the state of our rotten roads.



It's gone beyond potholes and crumbling bitumen to seriously huge holes and seriously dangerous conditions.

The number of accidents, road kill and damage to vehicles has escalated to a frightening degree. The cost of repairs to peoples' vehicles, often repairing roads themselves, is now too prohibitive.

Roadworks are slow to be done, and too often in a pretty shoddy manner resulting in road sections falling into disrepair after the first bout of rain. Nothing seems to be repaired properly. A bucket of whatever tipped into a crater and stamped down with a boot doesn't last long. Sign posts are damaged turned the wrong way or missing.

Crashes, near misses and serious accidents are increasing alarmingly. Roads like Tinonee Road and those off the main grid, become racetracks, ending often in accidents. Bucketts Way and Lakes Way have high danger reputations.

A growing alarm from residents is the explosion of heavy duty vehicles barrelling along these quiet roads, which, while killing wildlife, trash

the road surface and cause damage, noise and are dangerous.

Most these vehicles are taking short cuts or avoiding main road traffic. Many are drivers paid by the trip who rocket to the tip or wherever and back as fast as they can, even overtaking stationery cars waiting to allow cattle to cross.

Two thirds of crashes and fatalities occur in rural and regional areas.

Council promises and repair negligence count for little when one loses a family member due to the poor and dangerous conditions when they were just going down the road to get the paper.

Each year council promises to do about \$60M in roads yet they under-deliver by \$20m which is carried over year after year and they never catch up.

If we knew the rise in our rates was actually going to fix things, we wouldn't whinge. But when nothing seems to change except that we fork out for zilch, it's pretty frustrating being told everything at council is exceeding expectations.

DM

WHERE DO OUR RATES GO THEN???

All NSW Councils are required by legislation to have a Four Year Delivery Program and an Annual Operational Plan to show the community how their rates are being spent and to build trust and confidence that their Council is spending their funds wisely.

The Local Government Act requires the General Manager to report on the progress of the Annual Operational Plan and the Delivery Program to the elected Council and the Community every six months. The aim of these reports is also intended to show that the approved Budget is being spent as promised to the community.

Most Council's throughout the State report on their Operational Plan separately to the Delivery Program, we assume for greater transparency and clarity. However MidCoast Council claims:

"The Delivery Program and the Operational Plan (DPOP) have been combined into one document for ease of reading for the community, and to clearly indicate the link to the Community Strategic Plan (CSP)."

The past three MidCoast annual Reports on the progress of the Delivery Program and the Operational Plan shows there is greater accountability and transparency when the Reports are separated as the results can be easily tracked and there is no confusion on what has been delayed, deferred, or withdrawn.

According to MidCoast Council - *"Operational Plans are Council's commitment to their community on how and where funds will be expended and what services and activities the community can expect to be delivered during the year. These plans link to the CSP, being the long-term aspirations of the community."*

Therefore how did things shape up?

2022/23 Financial Year
Original Budget Expenditure:
\$279,516,475

Projected Budget Expenditure :
\$301,374,878 (24 May 2023).

Council reported that 53 (or

84.13%) of 63 actions were completed. And only 10 (or 15.87%) were delayed or deferred and 1% withdrawn. But when you get down into the fine print, Council then admits that there were actually 91 proposed actions to be undertaken in the year and that 28 actions almost 1/3 were either excluded, deferred or withdrawn. With the actual result being 53/91 or only 58% were completed.

2021/22 Financial Year
Original Budget Expenditure was: \$276,996,000.

Actual Budget Expenditure was:
\$265,729,000.

Council reported that 216 actions (or 77%) of 281 actions were completed. And 63 (or 22%) were delayed and 1% revised or withdrawn. Again, when you read the fine print originally there were 308 actual actions, so the actual percentage completed was only 70%.

2020/21 Financial Year
Original Budget Expenditure was: \$261,733,000

Actual Budget Expenditure was:
\$278,108,000.

Curiously, in the 2020/21 Report Council did not identify the proposed number of actions for that year. The stated figures were only percentages: 76.5% Completed, 22.5% Delayed and 1% Revised or Withdrawn. Not a very good result.

Sooner or later Council will be finally forced to address its floundering financial position. As the black hole deepens, they will be coming to the community to discuss affordability and service levels. Perhaps council should be reminded that their delivery of services has not been very productive nor proficient and the first step is to make Council operate more efficiently.



WILL THE ZERO YEAR CURSE STOP BIDEN?

American presidents elected in a year ending with a zero have a tendency to die in office. Will Joe Biden (elected in 2020) also be a similar statistic?

Presidents are elected every four years in even-numbered years. This means that a president could be elected in a year ending with a 2, 4, 6, 8, or zero.

However, virtually every president who has died in office, was elected in a zero year:

- William Henry Harrison: elected 1840, died 1841
- Abraham Lincoln: elected 1860, died in 1865
- James A Garfield: elected in 1880, died 1881
- William McKinley: elected in 1900, died in 1901
- Warren Harding: elected in 1920, died in 1923
- Franklin D Roosevelt: re-elected in 1940 for an unprecedented third term, died in 1945
- John F Kennedy: elected in 1960, died in 1963

Seven presidents, most of whom were assassinated.

Only one president who died in office was elected in a non-zero year: Zachary Taylor, elected in 1848 and died in 1850. His death remains unexplained, despite an exhumation in 1991 and a modern autopsy. The official explanation is that it cannot be proved he was assassinated by poison, and it cannot be disproved either.

Resuming the chronology, Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980. On March 30 1981, John Hinckley shot Reagan and the bullet came within three millimetres of his heart, nearly killing him. (John Hinckley served time as a mental health patient and was released about four decades after the attempted assassination; he now leads a quiet life out of the public eye).

George W Bush was elected in 2000. On September 11 2001 ("9/11"), one of the four hi-jacked planes was bound for Washington DC, perhaps targeted at the White House. Passengers fought the ter-

rorists, and the plane crashed in Shanksville, Pennsylvania killing all onboard. (Bush himself was not at home – he was at a school in Florida).

When Joe Biden was elected in 2000 there were concerns about his health and potential longevity. He was aged 78, the oldest person ever elected as president.

Biden is currently standing again in November 2024. He seems (from the opinion polls) to have a good chance of being re-elected, not because there is any great enthusiasm for him, but he is currently seen as the better alternative to the presumed Republican candidate, Donald Trump.

This zero year phenomenon is called "Tecumseh's Curse" or the "Curse of Tippecanoe". It allegedly began in 1811, when then Governor William Henry Harrison beat the Shawnee Indigenous leader Tecumseh at the Battle of Tippecanoe in Indiana Territory.

A curse was said to be placed on all US presidents elected at the beginning of each new decade. This is probably a folk tale because there is no contemporary evidence of it.

But the "curse" has exerted a strong memory in American politics.

The first victim to be elected in a zero year after the curse was supposedly imposed, was Harrison himself. He delivered one of the US's longest inaugural addresses in appalling weather. He died from pneumonia 30 days after the 1841 inauguration.

Some Americans are aware of the curse. Lincoln's beloved step-mother, for example, predicted his fate just before he was inaugurated and pleaded with him not to become president.

Leaping ahead to the Biden situation, one advantage that he has is the great improvement in medical science. It certainly saved

Reagan's life. If Reagan had been shot decades earlier, he would have died.

Given the prominence of a president, each president to die in office had his final hours minutely recorded. All of the victims who were shot, have graphic descriptions of surgeons trying to extract bullets from the bodies. (Kennedy's moment of fatal injury, with the top of his head being blown off, is even captured on a colour home movie). Modern readers are aghast at the brutality and unhealthy conditions of bullet extraction. Reagan was saved by the application of modern medical methods.

A related positive factor is the improved overall level of health of Americans. They work in healthier conditions, with a reduced risk of being caught in fire traps, reduced smoking, and the limitations on the consumption of drugs and alcohol in the workplace. Americans are therefore living longer than ever before.

American presidents – even elderly ones like Biden – are entering office with a healthier lifestyle. They are also subject to more sophisticated daily health monitoring than were most of their predecessors.

On the other hand, the job is even more demanding. An Australian prime minister is simply the "first among equals" and while tempted to have a unilateral "captain's pick" occasionally, they must keep their colleagues on their side, or else risk being removed from office by their colleagues, as Hawke, Rudd, Gilliard, Abbott, and Turnbull all found.

A US president by contrast is more like a king, and the cabinet is simply composed of advisers. A president cannot suffer from a backbench revolt and so be removed by his own colleagues (unless Congress finds he has committed high crimes and mis-

demeanours).

On the other hand, the president makes all the key decisions – if necessary, without consulting anyone. It is interesting to see how a term in office "ages" a president. They look much greyer and wearier when they leave office.

Additionally, the communications revolution has accelerated the need for speedy decisions and less time for reflection. There is the constant stress and wear and tear of office, with strict limitations on how a president can delegate his authority. He is at work for four years straight, whether in the US or overseas at, say a conference. There is no let up.

Finally, there is the US's notorious gun culture. Of the seven dead "zero year" presidents, four were shot.

American political culture is ambivalent on how much a president should be shielded from the general public. On the one hand most citizens do not want their president shot, and he has continual, somewhat intrusive, secret service protection.

On the other hand, there is a requirement for openness and accessibility. He has to "press the flesh" in campaigning and mix with crowd. The White House itself is not protected by a high wall but gives the impression of an ordinary fence through which people can see and even climb over (although the secret service is alert to such risks).

Modern weapons are a lot more dangerous than the pistols of the old days. There is also the new factor of a drone attack.

The zero year curse hangs over Biden for as long as he remains in office, whether that is until January 2025 or (if re-elected) January 2029.

Keith Suter

www.globaldirections.com.au

ROBERT MILLIKEN

1946-2023

One of Australia's most distinguished journalists, Robert Milliken, who died on May 21 from cancer, was born in Taree and spent the early part of his childhood in Wingham.



ROBERT MILLIKEN

His parents and his Aunt Jenny Cross owned and ran the Wingham Hotel, a much loved centre of town at that time. The Crosses had been in Wingham since the 1870's and Robert's grandfather, Harry Cross, was a local businessman and hotelier.

At the start of ten o'clock closing the family sold the hotel and moved to a cattle property out of Gloucester. Robert rode his horse to a one-teacher primary school at Rookhurst, and boarded at Scots College for his secondary years, where he became a member of the Scots pipe band.

After school he worked for a year as a copy boy on the *Daily Telegraph*, then gained an honours degree in political science at the University of NSW, before joining *The Sydney Morning Herald* in its first all-graduate cadet intake.

From the Herald's London bureau he covered the Yom Kippur war in 1973, crossing the

Suez Canal with the Israeli army, then the civil war that devastated Beirut, and the troubles in Northern Ireland.

Yet he turned away from the dangerous glamour of war reporting and foreign postings to return to look at his own country, in more and more depth, never intruding himself into the foreground. In the 1970's he worked at the *National Times*, a weekly in the Fairfax stable which, often to the alarm of conservative management, specialised in hard-hitting investigations. He broke a land scandal which ended the career of Coalition treasurer Phillip

Lynch.

In 1979 he won a Knight Journalism Fellowship to Stanford University near San Francisco, joining an elite group of promising jour-

nalists from around the world for intensive exposure of big issues.

In the mid-1980s he became Australian correspondent for *The Independent* of London. Later he moved to the same role with *The Economist*.

He covered the royal commission under Justice Jim McClelland into the British nuclear tests in Australia, resulting in his 1986 book *No Conceivable Injury*, a phrase from Robert Menzies' public assurance the bombs could not possibly do any harm in Australia's "vast spaces". The nomadic Aborigines of the plutonium-strewn desert did not count. Then it was the royal commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody, called after the death of 16-year-old John Pat in a violent police arrest in Roebourne, WA.

As a child, he'd been driven past settlements like Purfleet where the Manning's surviving Aborigines had been pushed. Now, for the rest of his life he investigated the causes and potential remedies for the atrociously high rate of Aboriginal incarceration.

In 1992 he travelled the regions

with photographer Lorrie Graham for their book *On the Edge* about the struggles of farmers as the economy of the land changed around them.

In 2002, he wrote *Mother of Rock*, a biography of the Australian journalist, rock music chronicler and feminist Lillian Roxon.

He wrote for the monthly journal *Australian Society*, and for the website *Inside Story*. His deep reporting on the atrociously high rate of Aboriginal incarceration was the highlight of his work for *Inside Story*, says its editor, Peter Browne.

He never lost contact with Wingham. His Milliken uncles owned a small farm out of Nabitac, and Robert eventually took ownership of it and it became a much loved haven from the city where he agisted cattle and brought friends for holidays.

Robert is survived by his sister, film producer Sue Milliken, and his extended Milliken family.

Hamish McDonald
Max Suich



Wingham Hotel

CAPITAL WORKS PROJECTS CENSORED

It seems the recent public awareness, concern and criticism of MidCoast Council's failure to deliver Capital Works Projects on time and to budget, has taken its toll on the Administration.

There has been a litany of capital works projects that have been delayed or not completed, some going back as far as five years. With the consequence of substantial cost increases, due to spiralling inflation, interest rates, and labour costs. This has meant project re-designs and re-costings as there were insufficient funds to complete the projects. Additional funds have had to be sought, often from Reserves or Developer contributions draining vital funds that could have been applied to other community projects.

Council's response to the public awareness and perhaps quite legitimate concern was commencing from the 26 July 2023

Council Meeting, was to censor details of nearly 100 capital works projects which were previously published openly in 'Attachments' to the Monthly Reports for the: *Community Spaces Capital Works, Waste Services Capital Works and Natural Systems Departments* of Council.

All these projects have now been branded and classified by Council's Administration:

"As CONFIDENTIAL in accordance with Section 10A(2)(d)(ii) of the Local Government Act 1993, as the information that would, if disclosed, confer a commercial advantage on a person with whom the council is conducting (or proposes to conduct) business."

This blanket application of the Confidentiality provisions of the Act makes a mockery of public

accountability and transparency which leads to a further erosion of public trust.

It is highly improbable that all 100 projects could fall under the quoted section of the Local Government Act as conferring an commercial advantage particularly as many projects have been tendered and have already been in progress for some time.

What the brains trust at MidCoast Council needs to realise is that the absence of useful information to the public will only lead to rumours and conspiracy theories throughout the community.

THE DOUBLE WHAMMY

The consequence of this brilliant initiative is not only is the public excluded from information on capital works projects that may

be critical to their locality but our elected Councillors are also gagged from publicly discussing any of the details that are listed in those so called 'confidential' project spreadsheets.

Rather than covering up, perhaps there should be a complete review of why capital works have not been delivered within reasonable timeframes over the past five years. One of those reasons could be that back in 2018, Council's structure was rather naively transformed from 5 divisions to 3?

Clearly the findings of the Performance Audit of MidCoast Council by the NSW Audit Office has had little impact on our Teflon Directors.

FAREWELL TO PARKY

Sir Michael Parkinson

TV host and cricket tragic, Michael Parkinson, recently passed away at home in the UK.

His TV interview shows in the UK and especially his stints here on Aussie TV were legendary.

He was a charming and delightful man on screen and off. Being a regular to Australia (where he came mostly for the cricket) he stepped in occasionally to co-host Network TEN's "Good Morning Australia" our first breakfast TV show along with myself when regular hosts, Gordon Elliott and KerriAnne Kennerly, took Christmas holidays.

Very happy days. Vale Parky.

DM



INSPIRING FAMILY HAVE HEALTHY LIVING DOWN PAT

Sometimes when starting a new beginning it pays to know nothing about it otherwise the pitfalls and inexperience are enough to extinguish any enthusiasm.

This is what Anna Axisa and her then fiancé Peter learnt when they took a leap into the unknown.

They were pushed to make up their minds by the doctor's news that Anna had multiple sclerosis, a chronic and incurable auto-immune disease which affects her balance.

As they both believe **how we live our lives matters**, they decided to adopt a back to basics, simple "village style" form of living.

In order to begin their new life, they went looking for cheap land, off grid with no infrastructure or services, where they could create a permaculture farm that would make them self-sufficient and unburdened by debt.

Determined to become what they coined 'homesteaders', they bought a 10-acre hillside on a south facing slope for \$100,000 in the Manning Valley at Killabakh on the Mid North coast.

Peter immediately started implementing a series of earthworks, aligned with a holistic, whole-systems he'd read about to create a number of flat, useable, interconnected terraces. These would be used for vegetable growing and rotational pasture grazing for animals he planned to introduce, which allows intervals for vegetation to rest and recover.

The couple got married and asked their wedding guests for fruit trees as wedding gifts. These became their citrus orchard. Then Anna stumbled across an advertisement for a small run-down compost worm business for sale. The couple drove to Medowie near Newcastle and bought it, even though they knew nothing about worm farming and had to make multiple trips to



Homegrown Healthy Living

START YOUR JOURNEY TOWARDS SELF-SUFFICIENCY



Anna Axisa

transport the worm containers back to their hill.

The modest enterprise they bought in 2014 is today a thriving business they call "The Worm Biz" that now supports their family of four. They harvest, pack and send 10,000 worm boxes a year to customers, each box Anna estimates contains 4000 worms.

The couple began their married life camping under a tarp, working

hard to establish the newly acquired worm farm, excavating and terracing further land on which to set extra worm mounds, shovelling horse manure into a delivery van from neighbouring paddocks and putting in dams. This done they constructed a solid shed, ran lighting from an old car battery, put in a solar shower, dug out toilets and used ice-filled eskies to keep their food fresh.

Anna rejected medication for

her illness and decided to use food and a healthy lifestyle as her medicine. To continuously nourish the soil, she puts all the worm castings in the above ground gardens to grow vegetables in what becomes nutrient-dense soil.

Now that Worms Biz is currently supporting 200 metres of worm production in windrows spread across four terraces, the couple have installed portable electric fencing powered by solar to rotational graze their two dairy cows on the terraced paddocks, plus chickens and other small farm animals.

They are also growing organic vegetables in 14 raised garden beds, 4 metres long by 1.5 metres wide and there is extra space on the terraces for medicinal herbs, flowers and other edibles.

The shed morphed into a simple homestead, a worm packing shed was constructed, a dedicated children's play space for their two daughters Lacey and Elke, a kitchen garden with perennial and seasonal crops and a layered 'chain' of ponds on both sides of the hill as a reticulated watering system.

Never one to sit still, Anna has introduced honey bee hives, lambs, goats and small pigs. She has also found time to write a book to share their hard-won knowledge. Not bad in nine busy years.

Anna has poured a lot of love and thought into her book. Even though you may not contemplate starting a self-sustaining farm, it is worth reading for it is beautifully illustrated with step-by-step guides in each chapter packed with useful information.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

The book is divided into a number of sections each with colour pictures and illustrations. It begins at the homestead, how they designed the hillside, the seasonal rhythms, a typical week of work and the animals they chose.

From there it moves on to a section called Living by Nature; what is permaculture, water saving methods, dealing with the food waste problem, why composting is important, different ways to compost, starting a worm tray, understanding worm castings as nature's fertiliser, general work farming questions and troubleshooting.

Anna goes on to extol the power of sowing a seed, seed saving, garden herbs, herbal honey, edible flowers, beetroot and what can't you do with it, growing sunflower micro-greens, even growing and grinding Arabica coffee for her coffee-loving husband.

There is a fascinating chapter on food as medicine in which she advises how to fight disease don't feed it, why she recommends cooking slow food, adding nourishing broth soup to your diet, making gee, growing and turning into paste turmeric, garlic and ginger, preserving lemons,

harvesting Chia seeds, whipping up Bliss balls and more.

From here she moves on to wild fermentation and says she believes good health starts in the gut. With this in mind she lists a number of foods including how to make sauerkraut, kimchi, lacto-fermented cucumber pickles to name a few, plus how to make homemade lemonade and brew kombucha.

Keeping in mind her farm is to-



tally sustainable, she shows us how to make natural homemade ointments such as aloe vera, moisturisers such as coconut oil, skin softening exfoliants, natural deodorants and castile soap.

To finish off this valuable manual packed with ideas and tips, Anna explains how she keeps positive mental health despite her diagnosis. She does daily meditation, practices mindfulness, chanting, sets for herself positive intentions and does regular body scans and other life enhancing rituals.

As a result, she continues to feel

healthy, but warns living regeneratively is a journey, not a destination. "You'll have successes and failures along the way, but there will always be something new to learn".

The one thing she still hasn't mastered is how to bake a decent loaf of bread, but she says that is just part of the adventure!

Sherry Stumm

"Homegrown Healthy Living"

Start your journey towards self-sufficiency

By Anna Axisa.

Contact: homegrownhealth.com.au



Packing worms to sell from their worm farm

THE PAINTED LADY!

What do a dilapidated hotel, a hypochondriac manager, an Italian chef, a politician and his secret lover, two travellers experiencing car trouble, a flamboyant artist with a surreptitious aspiration, a hapless love triangle, and a dead body have in common?

They all feature in 'The Painted Lady', the latest melodramatic offering from the Manning Valley Choral Society!

Founded in 1985, the MVCS -(as it is affectionately known)- has been entertaining the Manning Valley with a smorgasbord of musical works, genres and titles for almost 40 years. Performance venues have been as varied as the former Taree RSL, Manning Entertainment Centre, local Community and Town Halls, Church Auditoriums, Aged Care Facilities, Taree Court House, and in the heydays of the Man-

ning Valley Winter Festival, on the back of a B-Double!

The love of singing, the release of positive endorphins, and the joy of shared musical experience, has been the catalyst for the longevity of the group and its desire to be accessible to so many members of the community.

Commencing in February, 2023, the MVCS has been busily rehearsing 'The Painted Lady', an original work, and the brainchild of local theatrical and vocal artiste, Geraldine Mullin. Following her successful direction and productions of several MVCS melodramas including 'Black

Coffee', 'Movie Song Cruise', 'Wild Weather' and 'Tea and Tragedy', Geraldine has continued to utilise a creative formula that resonates with the choir and audience. Featuring musical themes, collaborators, composers and vocalists; a creative meld of personalities, problems, romantic delusions and trysts; and murder, mystery and mayhem thrown in for good measure, 'The Painted Lady' will have you engaged from beginning to end!

Highlighting the music and songs of the 1950's, well known favourites such as Volare!, Rock Around the Clock, Mr Sand-

man, Dream Lover, It's So Easy and That's Amore! will take you back to the dawn of the modern music industry, of Rock and Roll, of Pop, of Doo Wop and Rockabilly.

With talented local piano virtuoso Cameron Waugh providing accompaniment, it's a rollicking, engaging, humorous, toe tapping show, designed to lift your spirits, to feel the rhythm of the 50's, and to experience the musical and melodramatic fun of 'The Painted Lady'.



Back row: Stephanie Rodgers, Wayne Lambert, Cameron Waugh, George Dan, Rosalind Clinch, Sue Cowper
Front row: Robyn Rankin, Helen Bell, Lorna Crone, Heather Sydee, Krissie Waugh, Geraldine Mullin, Sue L'estrage, Ruth Crossman
Missing: Paul McDonnell, Barbara Davis, Will Knight, Tony Pike, Lia Wrigley, Lara Denes

Three performances only!

Sunday 17th September, 2023 - 2.00PM Coopernook Hall

Saturday 23 September, 2023 - 2.00PM MEC Theatrette

Sunday 24th September, 2023 - 2.00PM Club Forster

All tickets \$20.

Available at the door, or book ahead at the MEC and Club Forster.

ENGAGING WITH AGEING

Anne Ring

Recently, I heard the phrase “Stand up and speak out”. And I realised that that is exactly what I’m doing with my book, *Engaging with Ageing: What matters as we grow older*. I’m standing up and speaking out in my way, by writing about what I feel passionate about. And that is to give a reality check to what growing older – and old – is all about. *En*

As I see it, ageing is just another stage of life, with its particular ups and downs, no better and definitely no worse than any other stage that we’ve lived through. And so, through my book, I want-

ed to counteract the anti-ageing and ageism that we see far too much of in a society that overvalues youth and undervalues age.

Ageing is not to be feared, or denied, but to be fully engaged in: to be made the most of, enjoyed where possible, and managed in all of its rich complexity. My book covers big ticket items like changes in appearance, retirement as transition, lifestyle choices, sex in old age, taking care of our bodies and our minds – including how to manage challenges such as falls prevention and the possibility of living with dementia – and all the way up to thinking about what each of us would want for a good death.

It also looks at a rich variety of ways in which we can choose to

spend the extra time many of us are lucky enough to have, such as on encore careers, volunteering, memoir writing, inter-generational travel, exploring new experiences, joining interesting groups, and becoming an anti-ageism activist.

It took me 13 years of writing, rewriting and since my book was published I find myself becoming an enthusiastic pro-ageing and anti-ageism activist, spruiking the messages in my book through articles and talks that I’m giving at a whole variety of venues, from libraries and seniors’ festivals and expos to nursing homes, special interest groups, and even on national TV.

And I’m living with what has become my mantra, and the essence of my book: the words of the writer Benjamin Law, “Sure we’re all going to die. But getting old: that’s a privilege, Baby!”

There is no one answer to how to age. Each of us has to work out what works for us as individuals. So, this is by no means a prescriptive rule book – just a guide to stimulate thinking about how each of us can choose

to do ageing.

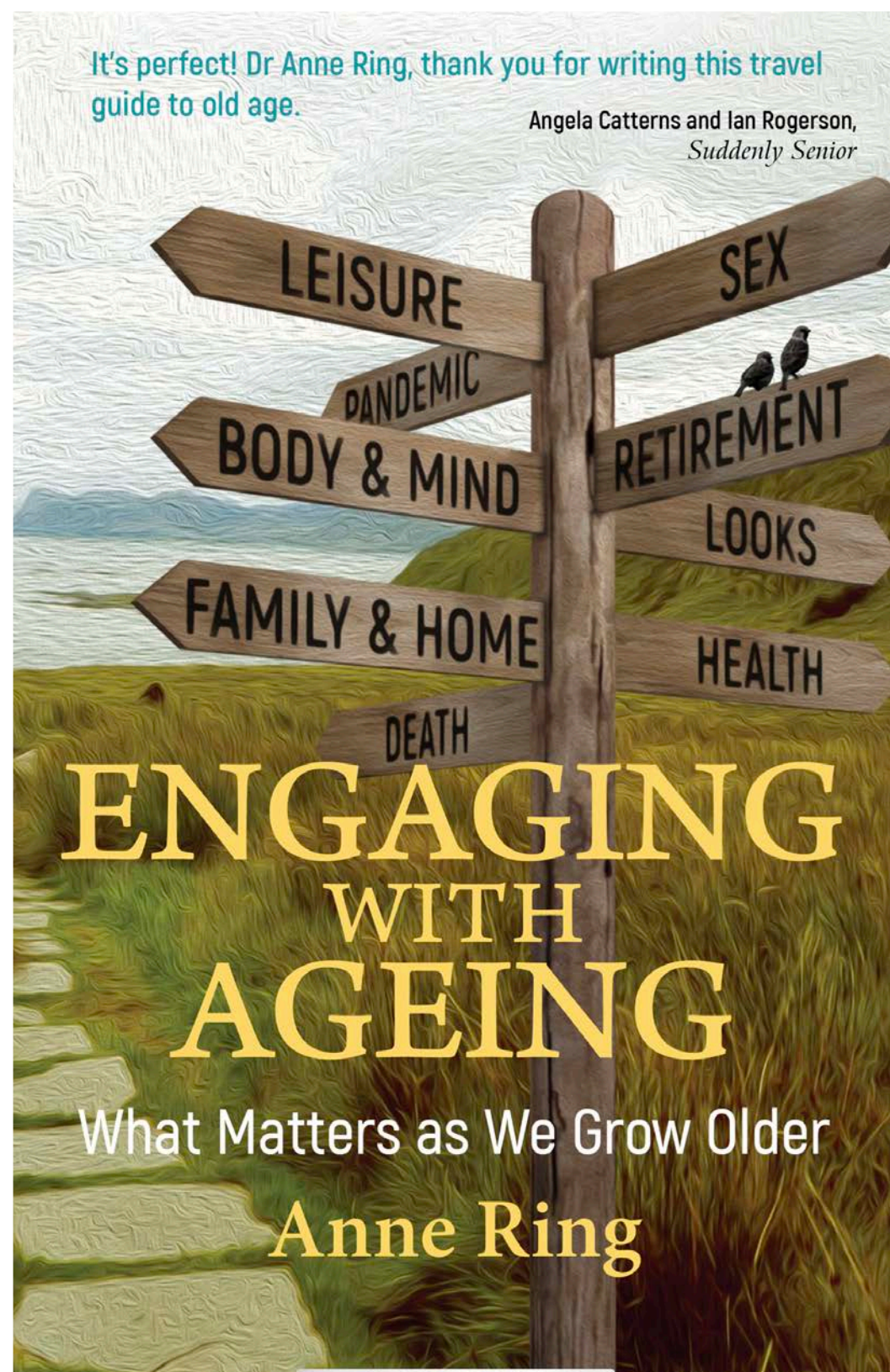
My hope is that the older women and men who read my book will find it useful in thinking about their own choices, in managing those consequences of the older ages that might crop up, while making the most of the opportunities and positives that we have as older people.

Younger people need insights into what matters in old age, both for their own futures, and – more immediately – to give them more understanding of their older family members and friends, and those with whom they might have a caring relationship.

While we are making the most of our own lives, we can also contribute to social change in attitudes to ageing, so that there can come a time when it becomes an accepted thing of pride to acknowledge, simply, being *old*. And happy about it.

Anne Ring is a health sociologist, freelance writer, and author of “Engaging with Ageing: What matters as we grow older”. See anнерing.au for more information about her book and her life.

Anne Ring©2023



Anne Ring

IS IT TIME TO RETHINK OUR GARDENING PRACTICES?



Whether you agree with Climate Change or not, the fact is, as a country, we are getting hotter and hotter, while our rainfall is becoming more unpredictable at best.

Should we be only growing plants that can tolerate lower water usage? Is it even viable to keep growing our own vegetables if the worst happens and our regular rainfall dries up?

If water restrictions become the norm, can we sustain a healthy veggie garden and fruit trees on grey water alone?

Is it just too hard to contemplate?

The answer is NO.....

Like the old saying goes.....we need to work smarter, not harder.

Planning is key and putting in the hard yards first may save both our water crisis and our beloved vegetable patch and orchard.

All of us have struggled with at least one garden problem through the last few years...be it mice plagues, birds raiding vegetable gardens, floods, fires, strong winds and extreme heat....and many of us are extremely time-poor and frazzled mentally since Covid 19 hit our shores.

SO, WHAT TO DO?

Here are some tips on how to make growing your own produce just that little bit easier and smarter this coming summer.

Most vegetable patches are set out to receive full sun, but with extreme heat and reduced water, this really puts your plants under a lot of stress, which if allowed to continue, brings on disease which means unhealthy and weak plants which are anything but healthy to eat.

Setup a temporary shade barrier to block out the harsh afternoon sun. Heat also warms up the ground around your plants, potentially poaching your plants alive. Use shade cloth or similar.

Mulch, mulch mulch...keeps the ground and root zones cooler.

Use dwarf fruit trees, they take up less space and need less water.

Plant the water-needy plants altogether and closer to the water source.

Double dig your garden beds and add plenty of compost and manure to retain more moisture, which will encourage worms and beneficial mycorrhizal fungi and nitrogen fixing bacteria, promoting a healthier plant.

Raise your beds to create more depth to hold moisture and cool the root zone.

When using grey water, start using eco-wise laundry liquid as they contain less salt, which builds up over time in the soil and eventually becomes toxic to the plant.

Avoid compaction of the soil as this inhibits water absorption.

Harvest every raindrop that you can using water pods or drums directly from your down pipes, if you live in town. Don't let it go to waste through the storm water drain. Install rainwater tanks.

For trees in open paddocks, create ridges, swales and basins on the lower sloping sides to trap the water around your tree's root zone.

11. Vertical mulching. This entails inserting upright sticks and twigs between your vegetable rows, this helps channel water deeper into the soil, while also creating shade and wind breaks to shelter your plants.

Choose vegetables and plants that require

less water like tomatoes, onions, shallots, garlic, chillies, olives and pomegranates.

Use under-mulch watering systems like

leaky hoses or Drip EZE irrigation.

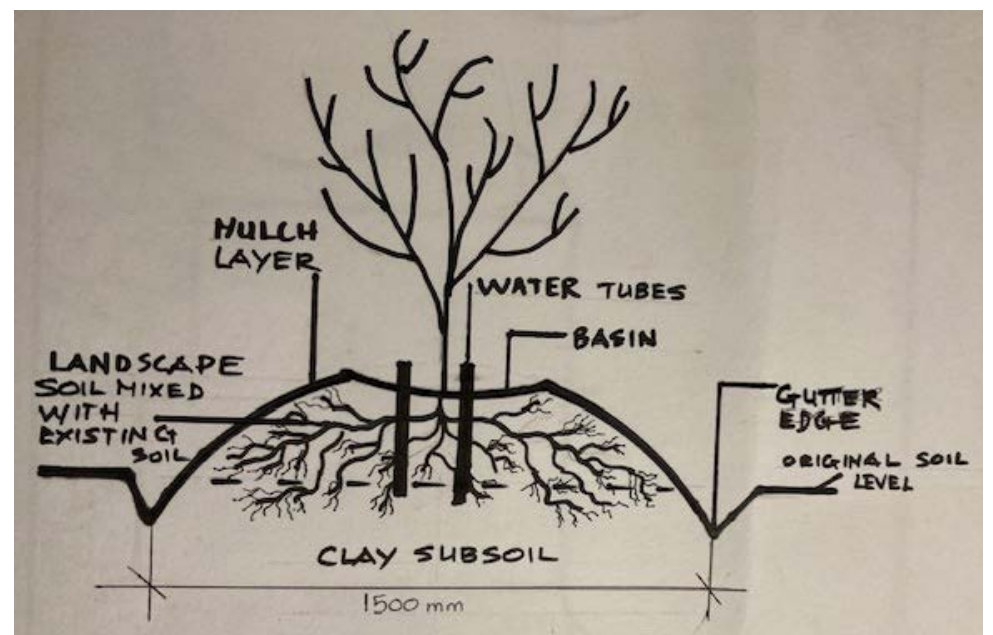
There are also a few tricks that can help your garden survive longer periods between watering.

WATERING TUBES:

When planting new trees and shrubs, take the time to insert 2-3 watering tubes. These are just lengths of slotted ag line inserted vertically into the hole at planting time. Cover the protruding end with some wire mesh to keep snails etc from nesting in them and a small stake to let lizards climb out when they get curious. You can also insert watering tubes into existing tree root-balls using a crowbar. Simply pour your water directly into the tube which will take the water directly to the root zone not just a few centimeters down like regular watering.

OLLA POTS:

These traditional water reservoirs have been used for centuries in des-



ert areas around the world. Originally, they were large rounded terracotta vessels, with narrow necks at the top. These can be expensive and very hard to procure locally. Fortunately, you can make your own.

We have just taken delivery of a big load of terracotta pots and saucers for just this purpose at the nursery.

Firstly, you need to block the drain hole in the pot. Secondly, bury the pots into your garden bed, just up to the rim. Fill with water and cover the top using a fitted terracotta saucer.

Done!

Space these through your garden bed, a metre apart. The rate at which water is drawn from the pot, is determined by how much the plant needs to draw from the soil as it leaches through the pot walls. We have trialled these at the nursery. In well-constructed, compost rich soils, the pots went almost a week before needing to be filled again. These OLLA pots also reduce weed growth as there is little to no mois-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15



DID I EVER TELL YOU THIS?



SAM NEILL

Text Publishing. Rrp \$49.99



I went on a holiday for a week and took Sam Neill along.

Well, his memoir – *Did I Ever Tell You This*. But it was just like hanging out with Sam.

It is not easy to reveal yourself on the page. But here, as you read you can hear his warm voice recounting episodes of his life. Like all of us, his life is rich in episodes of joy, despair, sadness and hilarity.

Success and failure.

And there's lots of personal photos.

Sam is self-deprecating, charmingly chuffed about some successes, and modest. He's also interesting, irreverent and revealingly honest.

He's a born storyteller.

Sam yarns about how he fell into acting, life in New Zealand and his landing in Australia to find a second home. There are many adventures, friendships, parties and behind the scenes show biz.

He doesn't spill the beans on his love life or family very much, it's just charming to feel you have Sam all to yourself as you read. You want to share anecdotes too!

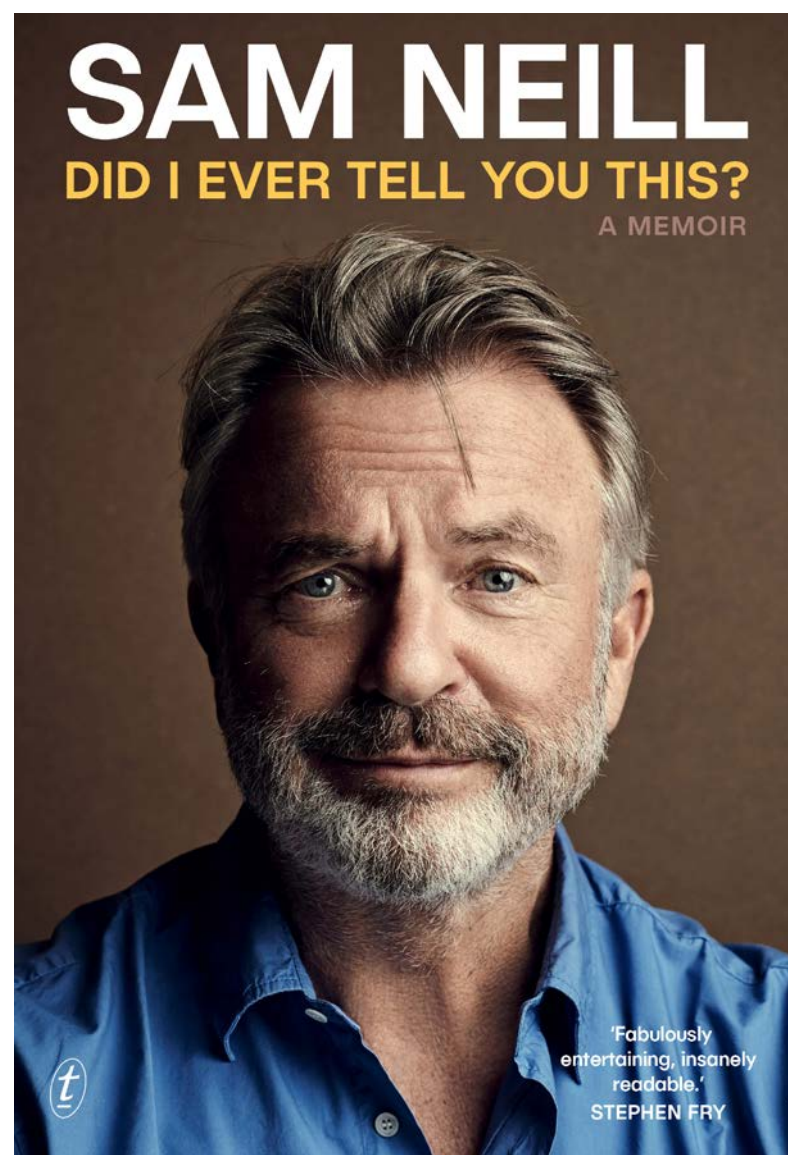
Sam's cancer diagnosis is dealt with and the book ends with a phone call telling him he's in remission. We cheer along with him.

Sam Neill's memoir is a delight to read. And I laughed aloud at some irreverent anecdotes.

I was sorry when I'd finished sharing Sam's life.

I look forward to whatever he may choose to write next.

DM



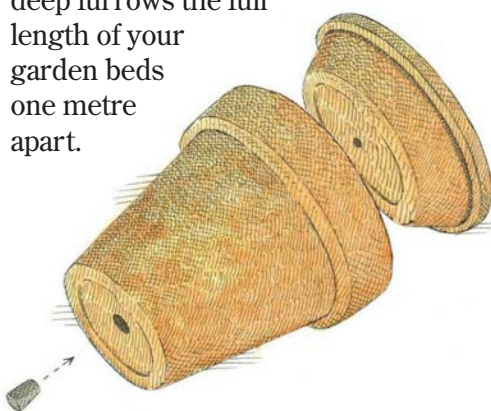
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ture on top of the soil for weeds to germinate. The use of thick mulch will also reduce weed growth while cooling the soil and trapping the water underground and reducing evaporation. Painting the saucers can also reduce evaporation through the clay.

You could also use wicks from these buried OLLA'S using natural hemp rope threaded through plastic tubing and then wrapping those lengths around the root zone of the plant.

UNDERGROUND AGLINE TRENCHES:

Using a post hole shovel, dig 30cm deep furrows the full length of your garden beds one metre apart.



(But no longer than 3 metres long) Peg it down using wire or steel pegs. Raise each end of the Agline up and secure them to steel pegs, 100mm above the soil. Cover the ends with wire mesh to keep critters out.

Once installed, run water through them to make sure the level is correct, and that water flows evenly to each end. Once satisfied, backfill and cover with mulch.

These underground channels will transport moisture directly to the root zone of your plants like corn, peas, beans, tomatoes. Each season, cultivate the soil as usual, avoid disturbing the agline.

Grey water can be used on all of these applications. If and when it rains, these devices won't create any problems like water-logging, whereas using water crystals and wetting agents may retain too much moisture should you get high rainfall due to flooding, like we have in the not-so-distant past.

When planting fruit and feature trees in your lawns or paddocks, use this simple strategy to ensure your trees grow healthy and fast.

This trick is especially useful if you have heavy clay soil.

Mark out a circle measuring 1500mm wide, spray the grass with herbicide or hand weed. Remember the best soil is directly under the grass roots, so shake it vigorously to retain that good soil.

Using a sharp edged post hole shovel, dig 100mm around the edge to create a gutter, throwing that soil into the middle of the circle.

Using a mattock or crowbar, frac-

ture the soil within the circle you've just cut.

Next add to this, 800 litres or one wheel barrow load of landscape soil or compost and manure and dig it through your existing soil for the best drainage and retention of water. As you plant your tree within this mounded bed, add your watering tubes, water the tree, then back fill the hole, (creating a basin around the trunk) water it again, then apply your mulch. The gutter around the edge of the circle will retain the mulch on the mound whilst also providing an edge to whipper snip for ease of maintenance. The basin around the trunk catches the water, directing it straight down into your well prepared soil. This process is a must for citrus trees as they dislike clay soil especially.

Happy gardening everyone, stay cool and hydrated, and never give up.....

Tanya Sawyer
Wingham Nursery and Florist
65534570
Winghamnurseryandflorist.com.au



IDI AMIN

THE MAN WHO STOLE UGANDA



Alex Mitchell

Published by Word Image Pty Ltd 2023

RRP \$20.00

Alex Mitchell has worked in the media for 50 years as a reporter and writer. In 1971 he was the first journalist to interview the then newly-installed self-appointed Uganda dictator, Idi Amin.

This is not a detailed comprehensive tome about the life and times of Amin, but a short albeit powerful 65 pages about an ignorant thug who, with the support of some powerful international "friends", rose from lowly soldier to head one of the most brutal regimes the world has ever seen. It is a story derived from Mitchell's memories and past writings. In the introduction Mitchell says this:

"This book is my own account of the unfolding of the Idi Amin story in 1971 and how it has continued, in the course of more than 50 years, to shed light on the covert workings of imperialism."

Most readers over a certain age will have some recollection of Amin, who began his dictatorship tenure being viewed as somewhat of a hero, then as a buffoon, and finally as the callous butcher that he was.

To the younger reader, by which I mean those under about 70, this book will be a great introduction to a fascinating time in the history of Africa as it was attempting to shake of its colonial past.

Uganda had gained its independence in 1962. But even most older readers are likely to be surprised to learn, and perhaps be shocked, about the way that Amin was supported by Western powers to come to power by staging a coup to depose the elected government of Milton Obote, not that Obote was one of the world's great democrats.

Mitchell has worked as a "court and crime reporter, war corre-

spondent, news editor, editor, chief of staff, columnist, political editor, sports reporter and London bureau chief." During the 1980's he was the State political editor of *The Sun Herald* and President of the NSW Parliamentary Press Gallery.

In early 1971 Mitchell had just begun working for British TV's *World in Action* program, which he tells us was commercial TV's

answer to programs such as *Four Corners*, when he was sent on his first overseas assignment to Uganda to interview Amin.

He had just arrived and was taking a refreshing swim in the hotel pool when his "laps were interrupted by a giant who dived into the water and started to churn up and down." The giant turned out to be Amin who challenged Mitchell to a swimming

race, which Mitchell had the good sense to lose.

Mitchell doesn't tell us whether he considered this encounter was just a co-incidence, but he got his interview.

It seems that Milton Obote made the mistake of adopting policies which Britain regarded as dangerously "socialist" and inconsistent with British commercial interests. Israel seems to have agreed and the book exposes how both countries were up to their eyeballs in helping Amin's coup against the Obote government. They both openly welcomed the coup as did other Western nations.

Before travelling to Uganda Mitchell and others had heard another side of the story and were keen to find the truth, and they were able to confirm reports of massacred bodies floating on the Nile River and Lake Victoria - victims of Amin's brutality. Brutality that continued until 1979 resulting in the torture and death of an estimated 500,000 people.

The resulting documentary that Mitchell and his team made after their Ugandan trip was titled "The Man Who Stole Uganda" and it was promptly roundly criticised by the authorities who had no interest in the truth being outed. However, as time went on and the truth could no longer be hidden, most were forced to change their tune.

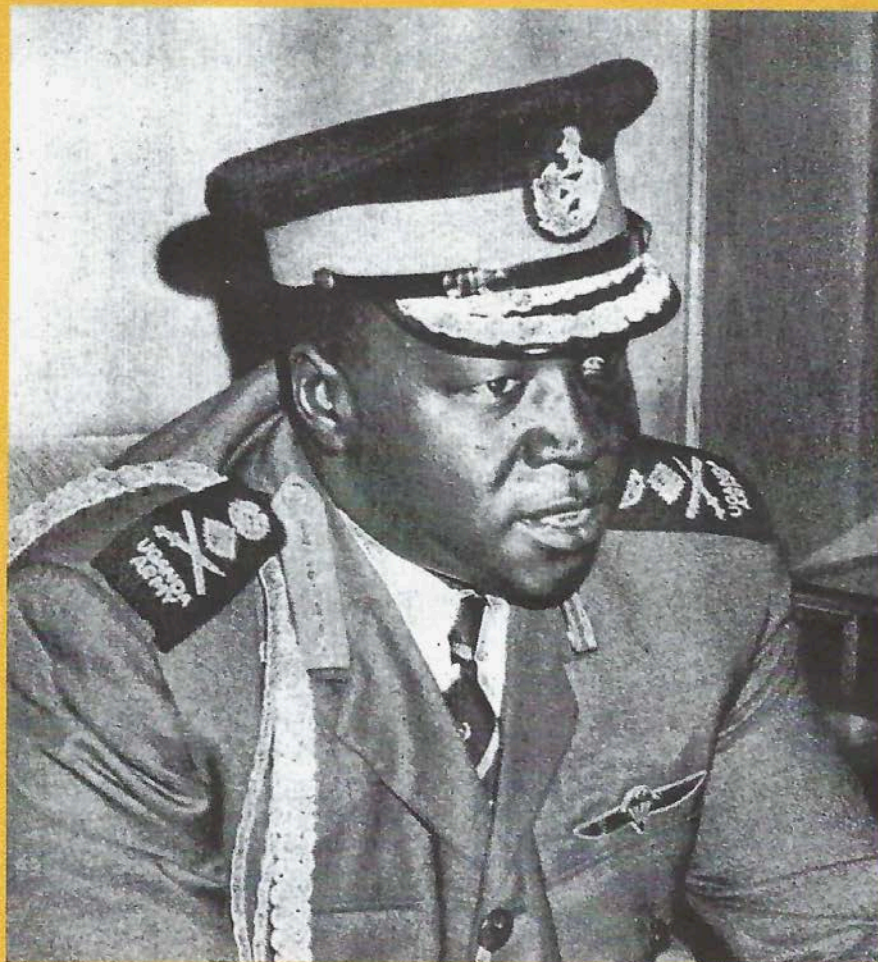
This is a disturbing tale which highlights the way that politicians and government officials seem to be able abandon any sense of morality when it comes international relations and national self-interest when it suits them. (*T'was ever thus? Ed*)

An interesting book. Well worth a read.

John Watts

IDI AMIN

The Man Who Stole Uganda



ALEX MITCHELL

"Idi Amin is a splendid type and a good rugby player."
— British Foreign Office official, 1964

FLAWED HERO

TRUTH, LIES AND WAR CRIMES



Chris Masters

Allen & Unwin. RRP \$34.99

On 25 May 2023, after a defamation hearing of 110 days, Federal Court Justice Anthony Besanko announced that he had found that VC winner Ben Roberts-Smith had committed war crimes in Afghanistan.

It was a stunning reversal for a hitherto war hero who had sued Channel Nine and others, including the author of this book, after stories had been published suggesting that he had committed, or was involved in the murder of innocent Afghani civilians, and had behaved badly in other ways.

The marketing blurb accompanying this book says this of Masters:

“Chris Masters PSM is one of Australia’s best-known, highly respected, and most influential investigative journalists. His stellar career has won him five Walkleys, and he has produced over 100 investigative reports, mostly for *Four Corners*....

He spent a total of three months embedded with Australian soldiers in Afghanistan in 2006 and 2010, including with special forces in 2011.”

Masters’ brilliance as a top-quality journalist is on display in this detailed and brilliantly researched analysis of the way that Roberts-Smith reputation ended up in tatters. And detailed this work certainly is, which means that it requires some real commitment from the reader, but it is worth it.

The book begins with an explanation of how the author was embedded with the Australian Special Forces at Camp Russell in 2011. It was his third embed and he explains how some soldiers thought it unthinkable that a journalist would be provided with such access. He was the first and the last journalist to be given such a privilege and he suggests that the explanation was “trust”. Because of this trust, over time, some soldiers were prepared to share some of their concerns about Roberts-Smith with him.

We hear about how Roberts-Smith had bullied and denigrated two junior soldiers, including punching one and threatening to shoot another, whilst also being awarded the Medal for Gallantry and the Victoria Cross, Australia’s highest military award for valour. The contrast between Roberts-Smith poor conduct on the one hand, and his

reputation for bravery on the other, is a major theme of the book.

Another theme of the book is the way that certain people were unwilling to listen to the evolving evidence about Roberts-Smith conduct, even suggesting that it was inappropriate for journalists to examine the behaviour of soldiers during war. One example is the way that the head of the Australian War Museum, Brendan Nelson staunchly defended Roberts-Smith, as did certain sections of the media, particularly the Murdoch media.

Early in the narrative the author says this:

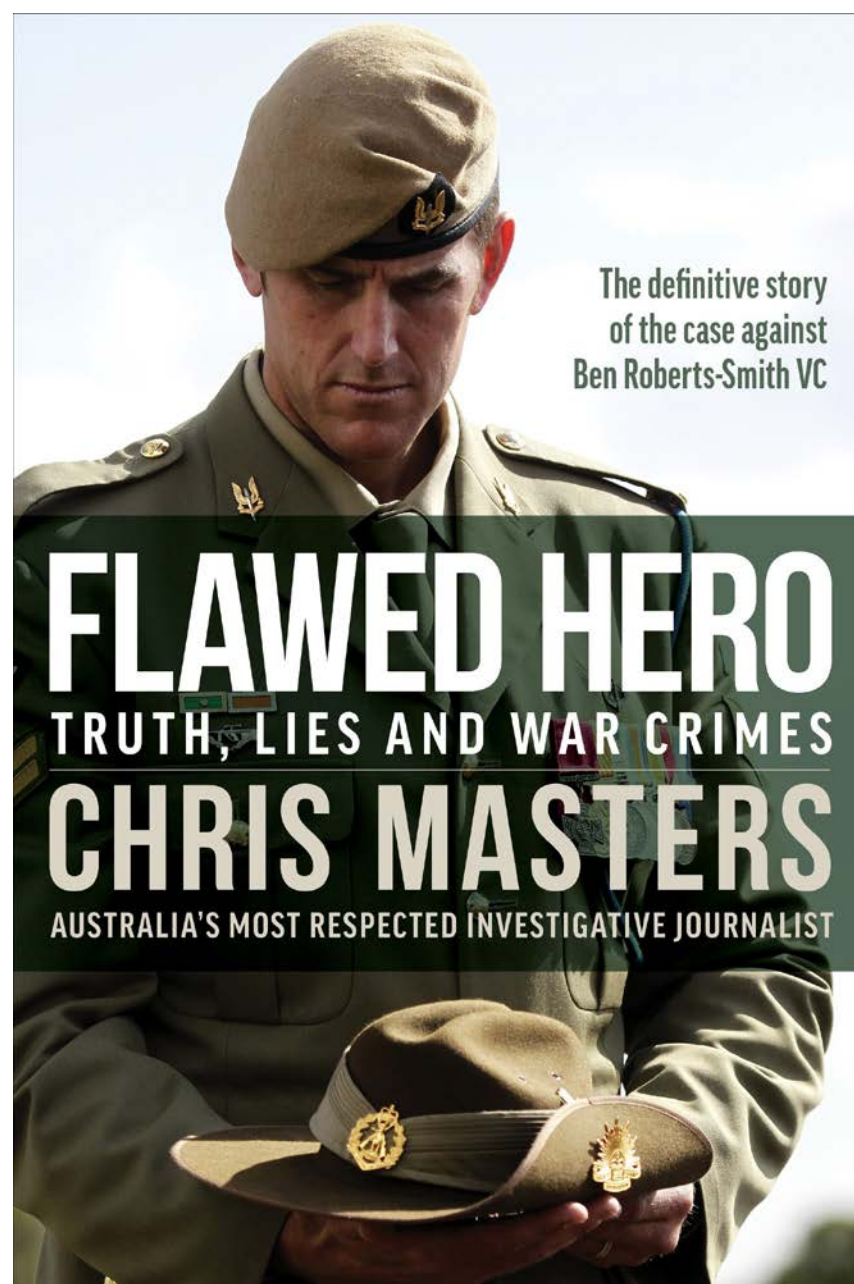
“Within Roberts-Smith own patrol there was discord about the merit of the VC, but at this stage the broader disquiet seemed to be more about whether the character matched the honour. As public adulation for the newly minted war hero grew, so did private grievance among his detractors. As one observer put it, ‘There is an overwhelming contrast between his public persona and reality.’ To Roberts-Smith and his supporters, the griping was simply jealousy and envy.”

The book goes into some detail about the various incidents which ultimately were used as the basis for the court to dismiss the defamation action. Masters describes a disturbing phone call that alerted him to what had shockingly happened in a remote part of Afghanistan in August 2012. We are told:

“He kicked this bloke off a cliff. As his face spun down, it smashed against the wall and his teeth sprayed out. The bloke who saw it can’t get the image out of his mind. He said he had to get away from Roberts-Smith. It was not the first time he said this stuff happened. RS is a bloody psychopath.”

Shocking but unreportable, this information rated less than second-hand. The cliff kick was being talked about by a small group of SAS operators in Perth who were concerned for the first-hand witness, who was not coping.”

After being kicked off the cliff the victim was shot. The murdered Afghani, whose name was Ali Jan, was no Taliban insurgent. He was the innocent father of three who had been collecting firewood for his family and



just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time when Roberts-Smith callously kicked him off the cliff.

During the trial Roberts-Smith denied any wrongdoing.

What is interesting is the way some of Roberts-Smith former comrades felt compelled, or perhaps pressured, to support his version of events because of some perverted code of silence, whilst quite a few others found the moral courage to tell the truth.

Bringing a defamation action is not something for the faint hearted. They are nearly always prohibitively expensive and can blow up in the plaintiff’s face, as this one certainly did. And a trial of this length, 110 days turned out to be obscenely costly. It was only because Roberts-Smith was supported by billionaire Kerry Stokes that he was able to engage a legal team consisting of three senior counsel. The defence case was funded by Channel 9.

This trial was made even more complicated by the fact that most of it took place during covid restric-

tions. It began on 7 June 2021 and judgment was delivered on 1 June 2023. The estimated costs of both sides were \$25 million.

The book goes into some detail about all the pre-trial skirmishing and then leads us through a blow-by-blow account of the evidence of the various witnesses where we are given a summary of each witness’s evidence-in-chief, cross examination and re-examination. Perhaps some readers will feel that they are being deluged with a bit too much detail. It takes over 300 pages of the book.

What particularly impressed me about Masters’s book is the way the story is told without exaggeration, emotion or sensationalism. He certainly doesn’t set out to do a hatchet job on Roberts-Smith—he just lets the facts speak for themselves, which is why it has such a powerful impact.

Highly recommended.
John Watts



ANTIQUES AND COLLECTABLES

Collecting is a hobby that lasts a lifetime and gives much joy and pleasure. Those memorable finds, the great people you meet, the new places you explore when searching for your treasures. It is a truly engrossing pastime. Find an area of collecting that interests you and get out there and enjoy the experiences.

Every household seems to have a collection of old and interesting items that have just accumulated over the years. Whether in the back of the cupboard or in the storage lock-up we all seem to have a supply. From mouth organs, grandma's porcelain, notes and coins, stamps, cast iron wares, dolls, varieties of glass ware, furniture to art objects. They just seem to accumulate.

In these times of greater financial care, support your local small businesses. They are the beating heart of our community. From the greengrocer to the butcher, the chemist to the newsagents, the clothing shops to the cafes, the bakers to all those small shops in our local streets (even the Antique shops). Support them all! Try not to do all your shopping in the supermarkets, the big franchise shops and online. If our small businesses close down the big boys just get bigger and more controlling of our dollar!

Kokeshi dolls are simple wooden Japanese dolls with no arms or legs that have been crafted for more than 150 years as a toy for children. Originally from the Tohoku region in northern Honshu, kokeshi are handmade from wood, having a simple trunk and head with a few thin, painted lines to define the face. The body often has floral and/or ring designs painted in red, black, and sometimes green, purple, blue, or yellow inks, and covered with a layer of wax. One characteristic of kokeshi dolls is their lack of arms or legs. Since the 1950s, kokeshi makers have



A kokeshi doll collection.

signed their work, usually on the bottom and sometimes on the back. Kokeshi dolls are surprisingly popular in Japan as a tourist attraction and abroad as a souvenir.

For decades, there has always been a kokeshi in every Japanese house. Since people buy them as souvenirs on trips or give them to others, the number of kokeshi dolls has gradually increased.

Kokeshi dolls were first made as souvenirs for hot spring resorts in the Tohoku region around the end of the Edo period (1603-1868).

At that time, 90% of the population were farmers, and hot-spring cures were an important event for people in the cold Tohoku region. The custom of "cold-weather visits" in midwinter and "mud-removal hot-spring cures" after rice planting had been completed instigated the making of kokeshi dolls for souvenirs.

In the beginning, kokeshi dolls were small enough to be held by

children, in other words, they were toys. They were used as dolls for girls' games. The kokeshi as a toy reached its peak at the end of the Meiji period (1868-1912).

In the Taisho era (1912-1926), new materials such as celluloid and tin appeared in addition to the traditional wooden toys.

The focus of toys shifted from kokeshi dolls to these new materials. Meanwhile, more and more adults began to collect kokeshi dolls for appreciation. Eventually, kokeshi dolls were transformed from children's toys into objects of appreciation for adult collectors.

Traditional kokeshi dolls' shapes and patterns are particular to a certain area and are classified under a variety types. The most dominant type is known as Naruko variety. The main street of the Naruko Onsen Village is known as Kokeshi Street and has shops which are operated directly by the kokeshi carvers.

Creative kokeshi allow the artist complete freedom in terms of shape, design and colour and were developed after World War II (1945). They are not particular to a specific region of Japan and generally creative kokeshi artists are found in cities.

The woods used for kokeshi vary, with cherry used for its darkness and dogwood for its softer qualities. A Japanese maple, is also used in the creation of both traditional and creative dolls. The wood is left outdoors to season for one to five years before it can be used.

Now kokeshi masters often sign their work with names, signatures and seals.

The variety is endless, the costs vary widely depending on collectability, but the enjoyment these little guys give is endless.

I hope that collecting brings you the enjoyment that I have experienced over forty odd years!

I have opened a shop (Antiques & Old Wares) at 12 Isabella St, Wingham – third year now. A retirement venture and continuation of my hobby. Lots of new stock. I have recently emptied my storage shed that I have rented for nearly 30 years. The owners wanted to redevelop. Some items have gone into new storage and some are still being sorted and priced in the shop.

Call in and say hello.

If you have items that you are not sure of, I may be able to help with information, appraisals &/or sales. I love the history and stories of old and interesting treasures. Phone Rex – 0427 880 546.

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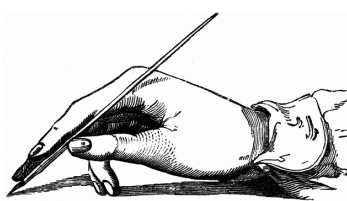
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YOUR SAY

Letters may be edited for space, offensive language or defamatory reasons.

Dear Editor,
I write to express my unequivocal support for a YES vote at the upcoming referendum on establishing a Voice for First Nations people in our constitution.

My direct interest goes back to the early 1970s when I joined the staff of the new Law School at the University of New South Wales as its administrative officer. Professor Hal Wootten was Dean of the Faculty at the time; as a senior barrister before being invited by the University to head the new law school. Hal had been heavily involved in the establishment of the Redfern Legal Centre drawing on the financial and professional assistance of like-minded lawyers, including Jim Spiegelman, who went on to be appointed as Chief Justice in New South Wales. I played a small part in the work of the committee that supported the front-line activities of the Centre under the able administration of Auntie Alana Doolan.

I was also closely involved in assisting the administration of a special admissions program Hal Wootten had persuaded the University to introduce. This scheme allowed admission to the law school to First Nations men and women who were intelligent and motivated to succeed, but by virtue of their background did not have the formal qualifications for admission, or the means, to what was otherwise a highly contested admission. The scheme's success is a matter of history with hundreds of successful young and not-so-young First Nations people qualified and admitted to practice, many of whom went on to careers in more senior roles within the Law profession.

In the 1990s Hal Wootten was deputy chair of the Enquiry into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, a report substantially and shamefully ignored by governments of all persuasions.

MANNING VALLEY

Later after moving to the wonderful Manning Valley, I was privileged to work with Taree Mayor Mick Tuck in facilitating a workshop at the Manning Entertainment Centre bringing together First Nations people, local business folk and councillors to put together a plan to better deal with the issues the Council then faced with some parts of the First Nations community in the Manning.

All this has shown me very clearly that while there are pathways through life for some First Nations people

to do well and indeed thrive, much needs to be done in addressing the systemic wrongs that adversely affect so many of our First Nations people.

During my business career in the Manning and in Sydney I have seen there is a real and substantive difference between "consultation" that means *"tell them what we have in mind and get their reaction"* and "consultation" that means *"ask them what they want to achieve and suggest how we get there."*

It is abundantly clear that much of what we have done, or tried to do, to make a sincere difference for our First Nations people has not worked.

Only change driven by genuine grass roots participation has any chance of success in addressing the imbalance in opportunity for Indigenous Australians. There is an overabundance of evidence to show that top-down intervention simply does not work ... think Mal Brough's Northern Territory Intervention by the armed service during the Howard years. There is similarly an overabundance of evidence that shows that change brought about by genuine community level involvement does work. Though individual examples of such success rarely get the publicity that wholesale interventionist programs get.

So, I am most definitely in favour of the YES campaign and sincerely hope most of my fellow Australians will feel the same and vote accordingly.

Do I think that a YES vote will show an immediate difference and "fix" all the issues all Australians face in properly addressing the "closing the gap" program of the federal government? Of course not! I am motivated by the old saying *"if you keep on doing what you've always done, you'll continue to get the same results."*

Do I think that all the issues in the Closing the Gap program will be addressed equally well? Of course not!

But I do know that well intentioned people in public administration and public life have tried the top down approach and have by and large failed.

Noel Pearson is right. If we give our First Nations brothers and sisters the responsibility for designing programs at local, regional, state, and national level, then the responsibility for both successes and failures will rest squarely on the quality of those discussions and consultations at those levels.

Peter Wildblood
Rainbow Flat



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