

Presidents Report

2024

It is a pleasure to be able to present the Annual report of the activities of your Chamber of Commerce through 2023-2024.

The Bega Chamber continues to be a great voice and advocate for not only the business community but the wider community in general and I would like to thank everyone for their involvement and support. I particularly want to thank the executive team who, apart from our monthly meetings are all involved in various activities either run by the Chamber or supported by the Chamber.

I would like to particularly thank Emma Keft who acts as our communications manager and does a great job with the monthly newsletter, Facebook and all sorts of communications. Emma also takes the minutes of our meetings each month has served a critical role on the Events team. More recently she has moved her focus to the membership team.

Also, Kirsty Towill who is a key driver of the events team and also our membership team. Kirsty is always focused on delivering support for our members and provide value and she is very good at keeping everyone motivated.

I would also like to highlight the efforts of John Stylianou on our Economic Development team. He has been a driver behind the McKee Drive Precinct and provides great leadership and practical advice.

I would also like to thank Steve Bartlett who does the largely thankless job of looking after the finances as Treasurer he is also responsible for record keeping and reporting to fair trading.

In 2024 the Chambers activities have been wide and varied, but as always, the focus is on making this a great place to do business and a great place to live.

The single biggest change has been the running of the Welcome experience. This program is being run by the Department of Regional NSW (who have recently changed their name to the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development). Bega was included as one of eight pilot sites around NSW to provide a worker attraction program for essential workers to the area. The Chamber lodged a tender in late 2022 and was successful in winning the tender in February 2023 to provide this service for the twelve-month pilot. In March we commenced running the program and this was later extended to finish on June 30th, 2024.



The pilot included the appointment a fulltime Local Connector and we employed Rachel Paterson who has done a fantastic job of providing the service. In the first twelve months we had 186 families register for the program and by June 30th that number had swelled to over 300.

Please read the full report in the following pages.

The second major project for the Chamber has been the completion of the Business Case and Concept drawing for the redevelopment of the former Bega District Hospital. We received a grant from the Department of Regional NSW in February 2023 with a six-month deadline to complete the project. As you will read later in this report the Economic Development team has put in an incredible amount of work to develop the business case for a community centre on the site. We also appreciate the efforts of local business NGH Consulting and particularly Ben Smith who went above and beyond the brief to produce a great result.

We have presented our plans to all three levels of Government and continue efforts to bring this project to a reality.



Below is a summary of activities undertaken by your Chamber over the last twelve months in chronological order however there are a number of other activities to report on including:

1. Scholarships – The Chamber agreed to provide two Scholarships of \$1000 each to students studying at the University of Wollongong
2. The Executive undertook a review of our vision and purpose statement with the most obvious change being our new purpose statement “Empower Business and Community to thrive”; see the full statement included in this report.
3. Removal of membership from the Bega Valley Business Forum. The BVBF has been undergoing some changes over the last couple of years including adopting a new constitution and broadening the membership base. The Bega Chamber do not agree with this course of action and therefore did not renew our membership to this group.
4. Policy and Procedures manuals – With changes to the Chamber and the employing of staff for the Welcome Experience the executive agreed that we need to improve our policies and procedures. This work is ongoing.
5. Addition to Website- The Chamber gets many requests to publicise news and events from other organisations many with strong connections to the Chamber. To that end we have added a community page to our website to provide another platform for them to promote their event or pass on some news. If you have something you want to share, just go to the website, click on the community tab and then enter the details.
6. Mural - As you will all have seen by now. There has been a mural painted adjacent to the Bega Soldiers Memorial on the Reject shop wall. This was done by the Bega RSL Sub-branch in the lead up to the 100-year anniversary of the memorial, which was built to honour all men and women from Bega who have served over the years. The Chamber was pleased to contribute some of the funds for the work to be done.
7. New Bega Signs – While this has been on the agenda for some time; work is progressing on replacing the entrance signs at the North and South of Bega.

Gold members

We also really appreciate the support of our Gold Members: Bega Group, Betta Home Living, Specsavers, Bega Village Marketplace, Telstra, Club Bega, Tyrepower and Mitre 10



This time last year we were talking about a couple of major projects that we were hoping to develop and now we are right in the thick of it. These projects along with our regular activities has made for a very busy year.

The years Activities

July

We held our annual meeting and welcomed our new executive team. With twelve members from almost all industry sectors it made for a very informed and effective organisation to provide support for our members.

September

On Wednesday the 13th of September we held our very first breakfast networking meeting at the Heritage Centre. Given the great role up, we will have more morning meetings in the future. Lisa and the team put on a fantastic breakfast and coffee which provided a great start to the day. Our guest speaker was Andrew Taylor who is the Circularity project manager. Andrew explained what Circularity means and how it will impact on the world into the future and also provided an update on the National Circularity Centre to be built at North Bega.

October

Cyber Security- October was small business month and there were many events around the area thanks to grants from the State Government. The Bega Chamber provided a free service to our members to have their devices checked and if needed implement improved security. This proved very popular with many of us improving our systems to help prevent fraudulent activity.

Spring into Spring – Also in October we staged our Spring into Spring retail promotion which was designed to add a bit of colour to everyone's shopping experience and appreciate the new season.

Glen Mia Saddlery were the winners of the best decorated shop winning them an add package on 2EC. We also encouraged shoppers to take a selfie in a business and post it to the Chamber Facebook page.

Women in Business - The businesswomen of Bega and surrounds held our second Women in Business breakfast, also in October. Around 50 women and a few men came together at the Peanut to share breakfast and be inspired by two great speakers. Debbie Bennington shared her experience of battling and surviving Breast Cancer. While Jenny Garner shared her knowledge as a breast care support Nurse. Funds raised from the event went to help Breast Cancer Research.

Kirsty Towill from our exec team and events committee did a great job of organising this event.



November-

Saw our networking event meet at the Southeast Centre for Contemporary Art. Where we were thrilled to be getting a sneak peek at the new facility and enjoy a tour by Director of the Gallery Iain Dawson. We also had a short presentation from Natasha Berta from the University of Wollongong about the RISE program for 2024.

December

Our last major event for the year was the Christmas Carnival held in Littleton Gardens on December 7th. Again, we had lots of entertainment for the kids with four different inflatable rides, two face painters, craft painting and fairy floss. This year on the stage we enjoyed great entertainment from local legend Matt Preo, Star maker finalist Felicity Dowd, the Bega District Development Band and Bega Brass Band and the Students from Bega Valley Public School.

For the first time in a number of years the combined Churches of Bega presented Carols to round out the night.

The Chamber presents this free event every year as a way of saying thank you for supporting local businesses.

January

The Chamber again sponsored a race at the Sapphire Coast Turf clubs' biggest event of the year the Bega Cup. While we do not want to be seen as promoting gambling, we do recognise the enormous number of visitors this event brings to the region and the economic benefits that flow from it.

February

Our first networking event for the year was held on Wednesday the 21st.

As always, the Civic Centre provided a nice venue and some very tasty canapes and drinks. Our guest speakers for the evening were Corinne Gibbons who shared her life journey as a musician, and recent experience of travelling to COP 28 and conducting the world's largest youth choir. We also heard from John Reynolds on the progress of the restoration of the Old Old Hospital and the excitement that is building with the completion of the new roof.

March

At the end of March, we staged our Easter retail promotion with an entry sheet in every participating business with the winner receiving \$1500 in prizes from our Gold members. This included dining vouchers at Club Bega, gift vouchers from Betta Electrical, Mitre 10 and Specsavers.

April

Our April networking event was held on Wednesday the 17th of April.

For something a little bit different we met in the Bega Village Shopping Centre hosted by Centre manager Joanna Ravan.

Our guest speaker for the evening was Sanchee Barnes who has developed an app called CanXsee. Sanchee lives in the Eurobodalla and appreciates the need to support local business which is the basis for the new app. The app was launched in the Eurobodalla and was now being launched in the Bega Valley.

May

In May we held another Cyber security night in conjunction with the Commonwealth bank, which was very well attended, and the practical information provided was appreciated.

Other activities

Throughout the year your Chamber has had many meetings, discussions and provided input with a range of organisations on various issues that impact Bega and the District. Some of these include.

Premier of NSW Mr Chris Minns	Member for Bega Micheal Holland
Member for Eden Monaro Mrs Kristy McBain	Mayor of Bega Shire Mr Russell Fitzpatrick
CEO of Bega Shire Mr Anthony McMahon	Presentation to full Bega Shire Councillor workshop
Regional Development Australia	Australian Department of Health and Aged Care
Business Council of Co-operatives and Mutuals	Resilience Ready
University of Wollongong	Business NSW
Workforce Australia	Service NSW

Retail Revitalisation

Recently the Executive have been discussing how we can revitalise and stimulate the entire retail community to work together to promote the town and the great shopping and businesses we offer. To that end we have engaged Quality Matters Consulting to work with us to come up with some new and innovative strategies.

Throughout June and July, we have been contacting as many of our retailers; both members and non-members as possible to discuss how we can work together better.

In the first week of July, we have sent out a survey to find out what businesses think has worked in the past and what didn't. What the Chamber is doing well and what it's not.

Most importantly we want to hear ideas of how we can stimulate business. What have you seen work elsewhere; what you have done in your business that could be expanded to include everyone. These could be really big ideas or just smaller simple things we can achieve.

Apart from the online survey the team from Quality Matters Consulting have been contacting a number of our retailers both members and non-members to dig a little deeper.

Over the next month we will bring all those survey results together before staging a planning meeting on September the 3rd. At this meeting we want as many retailers as possible to come together in the same place to talk this subject through and come up with some great strategies for the future.

Chamber Award

In October of 2023 the Bega Chamber was announced as the winner of Best Chamber for the Far South Coast region, which covers from Goulburn down to Ulladulla and South to Eden. Other businesses that also won their categories were East Coast Radio, Hanna Rossi from the CBA and Tulgeen Industries.

What's coming up.

1. **Office space** – The executive team have approved the establishment of a Chamber office as part of a co-working space. To that end we have agreed to lease the top floor above Office Choice in Hill Street and are in the process of converting it into an office space. It is exciting to have PCYC join us as permanent cotenants with ongoing discussions with others. Importantly the space will provide

occasional office space for lease as well as hot desking. Also included are two training/conference rooms for up to 50 people.

We are hoping to have the space ready for occupation by the middle of August.

2. **Bega Beautification Team** – Recently we have established a team to look at how we can improve the look of town. This team consists of community members who have long worked in this space and have strong views on what can be done. Soon we will have a list of ideas and can set some priorities for getting things done.
3. **Customer Service Awards**- Bega stages its own customer service awards every second year and so we have locked in October the 26th for the event this year. The Bega awards are really focused on the customer experience and the hope is that everyone will strive to improve their customer service in their businesses and achieve recognition. Nominations will open in late August.
4. **Regular network events** – Naturally we will continue to run our networking events, approximately every six weeks depending on what is happening at the time.
5. **Continued promotional activity** – including a Spring Retail promotion and the Christmas Carnival.

In closing I would again like to express thanks to the executive team who meet monthly and discuss a range of issues. The Chamber is constantly being contacted by many organisations seeking all sorts of information and assistance and the knowledge and experience of the executive team is really appreciated.

A special thankyou to all that serve on our sub-committees whose contributions make a real positive difference to the town and community.

Thank you all for your contributions throughout the last year and I trust that you will continue to support your Chamber and can see great value in your membership.

John Watkin
President

Bega Beautification team

Andrew Warby
Irene Hetherington
Brad Eastman
Peter Lacey
David Whittaker
Pauline Bonora
Peter Turner
Chloe Gars
Peter Vanbracht
Robert Kingston
Narelle Griffin
Ralph Hetherington

Economic Development Team

Brad Eastman
Robert Kingston
Kevin Johnstone
John Stylianou
David Akehurst

Events Team

Kirsty Towill
Sharon Donnelly
David
Angela Kane
Tara Chiu

Member Engagement

Emma Keft
Kirsty Towill