

Another very interesting year for members and friends of Business Northwest. The economic climate for the financial year was one of turbulence as interest rate rises punished those businesses with outstanding loans and also impacted customers with increased mortgage bills to pay, creating tough economic conditions for many of us. Inflation ranged from 7.3% at the start of the year, rose to 7.8% and then recently settled at 6% with indications of further reducing and reaching RBA target in late 2024. Businesses are still feeling the effect of high interest rates plus wage and superannuation increases and a general downturn in consumer confidence. We are “not out of the woods yet”.



Sadly, in November we lost one of our greats – John Pease OAM. A man who truly loved Burnie and served it so well. John was a life member and an avid supporter who regularly attended meetings and passed on his wisdom to us. He is sorely missed.

Financially we remain strong despite a loss for the year. Our cash assets have never been higher and due to the Table Cape project we have over \$100,000 of audiovisual and Virtual Reality equipment that can be used to make revenue in coming years. The projectors are probably the most powerful in the region and we anticipate strong demand for hire.

The highlight of the year was the completion of our *Sensing Table Cape* project launched on June 30th. Masterminded by Justin McErlain and Cyndia Hilliger this two-year, multipronged project showcased Table Cape in many forms.



The projection onto the lighthouse featured a work by prominent indigenous artist Caleb Nichols-Mansell and was absolutely spectacular! It was accompanied by a moving narration by the artist on our “silent disco” headsets (which also helped to keep ears warm).

Two Virtual Reality (VR) exhibits were developed in partnership with UTAS and had visitors to Wonders of Wynyard (WoW) enthralled as they flew over the cape in *The Glass Elevator* or wandered about the cape using *Walking with Giants* examining virtual objects relating to the history of the area.

The interactive table at WoW allowed multiple users to explore Table Cape from several perspectives and is the first of its kind in Australia.

I don't think that people realise these displays are world class exhibits and could take their place in any interpretive centre nationwide. There were queues out the door in the first two weeks of operation!

At our breakfast in May well-known Logie Award winning actor Samuel Johnson spoke to us via videoconference on his campaign [Sam's 1000](#) which aims to get 1000 businesses to sign up to a regular financial contribution to help provide Precision Medicine to cancer patients. We believe this to be a great cause so enrolled in the program and urge businesses of all sizes to investigate it and also sign up.

In keeping with our goal to drive more visitation to our region we continued to expand the footprint at the Penguin Observatory installing a dual vertical screen showing the live camera feeds from within five burrows allowing visitors to see the Little Penguins during daylight hours – a real treat for thousands of cruise ship passengers. This year we will be extending our live feed of the platypuses at Emu Valley Rhododendron Gardens. We have assisted EVRG to get a higher quality internet feed that will be capable of supporting live streaming to our YouTube page.

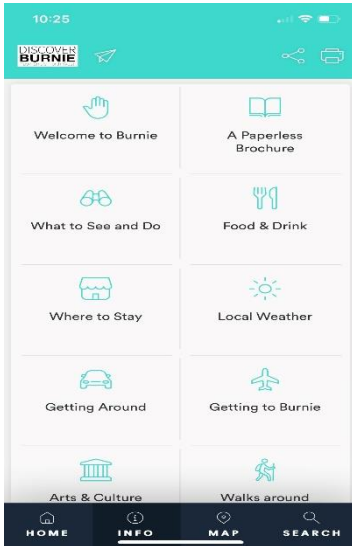
These two initiatives are already assisting with attracting more visitors to Burnie and volunteers at both sites have plenty of anecdotes of visitors from all over Australia who after having seen the YouTube feeds decided to come here to visit the attractions in person.



Breakfast Networking Sessions continued to be popular with attendance ranging from 18-42 and featuring prominent business leaders, politicians and service providers. The networking aspect is an important component of these events, and they are a great way to start the day. The live streaming of the breakfasts is also popular and recently we have added a [page to our website](#) that has every breakfast in the last five years. I thank Michael Cannon and Justin McErlain for their work in making these breakfasts possible.

We continue to enjoy a high profile in local media. Many listeners enjoy the fortnightly morning show broadcast on 7BU with Leigh Kenworthy. We have had regular exposure in The Advocate plus occasional appearances on radio and TV. We have added a [media page](#) of all our recent press coverage to our website.

The strong relationship with Burnie City Council (BCC) continued and we partnered for several initiatives. We developed the Burnie Discovery Hub in a shipping container that was placed in the Civic Centre Plaza to assist in welcoming cruise ship passengers. We developed an interactive web app that ran on a large all-weather, double-sided kiosk attached to the container. The kiosk can be deployed to any location as required to serve our visitors.



Additionally, we set up the *DiscoverBurnie* app to run on portable devices, tablets and smart phones. In the season from October to April it was downloaded over 65,000 times.

It provided comprehensive information about Burnie and surrounds - from what to see and do, coffee shops, weather, arts, transport, walks, accommodation and tourist attractions.

This year we will on-develop the app to include more categories making it a comprehensive guide for visitors and residents.

Outdoor street dining and free parking on Saturdays pre-Christmas were other initiatives we developed in conjunction with Council through trial usage. I expect outdoor dining will expand for the next cruise/tourist season and provide a more cosmopolitan feel to the CBD.

In October the area was plunged into disarray when the Cam River bridge was reduced to a single lane for several weeks. For years we had been advocating for a second crossing at the Cam River and the incident certainly proved our argument.



We immediately initiated discussions with the Deputy Premier and shortly after the Premier agreed to investigate the feasibility of a second crossing. Let's hope that is fruitful and a plausible location is found to provide the redundancy the region deserves.

In terms of advocacy, we participate in the Chamber Alliance group that meets monthly to share experiences and to discuss issues affecting our members. Twice Minister Ogilvie has attended our meetings and we often have meetings with state and federal politicians seeking input on matters affecting the local business community. Federal Minister for Small Business the Hon. Julie Collins has met with us twice this year and was keen to hear of any issues our members are facing.



Our biggest advocacy win was ensuring the new courthouse will be built in the CBD. This was a long hard battle but a victory for common sense and I am proud that we led this fight and stayed in it even after others thought it was lost.

I have been invited to join the Stakeholder Reference Group that will provide valuable insights, diverse perspectives, and contemporary advice to ensure that the new courthouse meets the needs and aspirations of the court users and the Burnie community more broadly.

It is pleasing that BNW is sought out for consultation by many differing organisations – from state and federal MPs, RDA, State Growth and other departments plus media.

Additionally, I am our representative on the Cradle Coast Authority’s Regional Economic Development Steering Group, the BIG committee, TasNetwork’s North West Transmission Development Stakeholder Liaison Group, West North West Working and the recently formed Burnie City Rejuvenation Reference Group. So, we are well represented!

In November I was elected to the Board of the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce & Industry for a two-year period as one of two Directors from the north west coast (the other being John de Bruyn). This position gives us further strength for advocacy and good exposure with the peak business body in the state.

I thank the members of our Executive group for their time and assistance this year especially Secretary Justin McErlain and Treasurer Ant Dry. In addition to those elected at the last AGM we welcomed Josh Whiteley and Des Hodgetts to the group late in the year and look forward to them adding value in coming years.

I thank our sponsors who help “keep the lights on” - please support them as they support us.

In conclusion, I thank our members for their support and wish the incoming Executive all the best for another prosperous year.

Ian Jones

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