

**Speech notes: Mayor Cr Libby Stapleton
Aireys Inlet & District Association
Annual General Meeting
Aireys Inlet Community Hall
Saturday 10 April 2021, 3pm**



Hello everyone, it's great to be on home turf and a real privilege to be here with you for your Annual General Meeting.

I would like to start by acknowledging that we are meeting on Wadawurrung Land and that Wadawurrung people are the traditional custodians of this land. As many here would know, this part of the world was once known as Mangowak, and next door we have the Mangowak School sanctuary.

I'm pleased that many children of Aireys Inlet have grown up knowing the original Wadawurrung name of this place ... and learning about the language and culture of this ancient land ... thanks to the efforts of Greg Day and other passionate locals who have worked with our local school kids over the years.

The Wadawurrung people have nurtured and protected these lands for thousands of generations, and we pay our respects to their Ancestors and Elders, past, present and emerging.

I would also like to acknowledge Gadubanud people as custodians of the land south of Painkalac Creek.

It really is lovely to be here in Aireys and a pleasure to be bringing you some updates from Council.

I am sure all of us grateful to be able to be inside the hall together, after our isolation experiences of the past year. The pandemic has presented a challenging time for many of us in so many ways, and I know Council has worked especially hard to provide support where possible. This has ranged from significant financial support to hands-on community support.

Council is proud of the ways in which it was able to reach out and the way our community has handled the various challenges and difficulties.

Council's financial support package of more than \$2 million included a \$1 million COVID-19 assistance recovery fund and grant program.

Other components included:

- Support for people experiencing financial hardship with waiving of interest on outstanding rates and debts, and payment plans for people experiencing hardship.
- Rate relief rebates for commercial and industrial ratepayers.
- Establishment of a Community Support Team, with staff and Councillors meeting regularly with community groups to hear concerns and find ways to help. AIDA has been well represented with this group by Charlotte Allen, who continues to chair its monthly zoom meetings, now known as Community Action Groups.
- Council also streamlined its permit system for outdoor dining with creation of a special Alfresco Concierge Team, and
- Launched the online 'Buy Surf Coast' and 'Inspired By Surf Coast' campaigns involving hundreds of local businesses to support them through COVID and the low season.

As part of the recovery fund grants program Aireys Inlet Tourism and Traders' Association received a \$12,000 allocation to support promotion of businesses and the town.

The outdoor dining program received 64 business enquiries from across the shire, resulting in issuing of 45 permits. We had three permits issued in Aireys, one in Fairhaven and seven in Anglesea.

The Inspired By Surf Coast buy local campaign has proven a success, gaining strong followings on social media platforms.

A total of 32 Aireys businesses have listed on the Inspired By Surf Coast map, with

- 12 from the hospitality sector
- Seven representing general shopping
- Two from the health and wellness sector
- Two from creative arts, and
- Nine from trades and services

In economic terms the pandemic has of course had significant impact, including a dramatic contraction in total expenditure across the shire from \$45 million in 2019 to \$25 million in 2020.

Lockdowns and travel restrictions did however result in some interesting dynamics in spending on a local level. Aireys Inlet – Fairhaven residents spent \$1.92 million during 2020 – an increase of \$700,000 from 2019.

Because people were staying locally, they spent more in other parts of Surf Coast Shire, an increase of \$1.87 million on 2019 bringing the total to \$7.55m. And their spend outside the shire was down \$2 million on 2019, to \$11.3 million.

In terms of JobKeeper applications from the Aireys, Fairhaven and Moggs Creek area ... they rose from 85 in April to 92 in July and 94 in August ... before dropping to 53 in October and 51 in November with the welcome return of regional visitation.

Events play an important role across the shire, and we are normally home to more than 200 events, festivals and markets each year. They typically generate an estimated \$100 million in direct economic benefit, as well as in some cases huge global viewing audiences. For the best part of 2020 we had no events, bar those able to transition to virtual means.

In addition to economic benefits, events:

- Attract visitors to town
- Strengthen communities
- Showcase and inspire creativity
- Promote social inclusion, and
- Contribute to the physical and mental wellbeing of residents and visitors.

They will play a key role in supporting our region's economic and social recovery – revitalising and re-engaging our towns and communities and supporting local businesses. And I am pleased to note that our Aireys events calendar is regaining some momentum.

Following the successful recent staging of the Open Mic Festival last month, we have some other dates now on the radar:

- The Great Ocean & Otway Classic Ride, which will see thousands of cyclists ride through the town on 24 April.
- The Surf Coast Trek, with 500 walkers starts from the Aireys skate park on 1 May.
- Love Winter in Aireys kicks off again, running from 1 June to 31 August, with the support of a \$3000 Council Community Event Support Grant, though this year's format will have some COVIDSafe modifications.
- We have the Surf Coast Trail Marathon finishing at Fairhaven on 26 June, with an after-event at the Aireys Pub.
- And of course our monthly Aireys Inlet Markets have been running since November, and feedback has been extremely positive from community, stallholders and visitors to town. It was great to see AIDA with an information stall at this month's Easter market, engaging with local community and visitors to town.

The Open Mic Festival itself brings an estimated economic impact of \$1.5 million, and is supported by a \$10,000 Council events grant.

Hopefully we will see more events returning as we continue to adjust to our new COVIDSafe and COVID Normal lives.

With our new Council settling in, we are now at an exciting threshold with work well underway on our Council Plan and other important strategic documents. (H&WB, Asset Management, Financial Plans)

To help guide this process we are working through a detailed community engagement titled People Place Future – which hopefully some of you have participated in. This engagement will help inform our strategic plan for the next four years and also shape our long-term community vision.

We were pleased to receive more than 1200 responses to our initial engagement survey – as well as several submissions – all providing really thoughtful insights and valuable data. Now a 35-member community panel is in the process of drilling into that data, considering our community's priorities, along with key topics and dilemmas, and will present a report to Council. Council will then finalise the Council Plan – incorporating a Public Health and Wellbeing Plan.

Some common priorities have already emerged from our community engagement, and they include:

- Climate change
- Management of growth
- Impacts of development on township character and lifestyle
- Protection of landscapes and the natural environment
- Provision of community infrastructure
- Understanding of how the needs of our hinterland and coastal communities differ
- Community connection
- Impacts of the pandemic on the economy, and health and wellbeing; and,
- Local food production

Councillors are looking forward to hearing from our community panel and then taking next steps on this important journey.

I'd also like to acknowledge the significant work of AIDA pulling together its 2020 Community Survey results. I think we're already finding there are some synergies in your survey results and the outcomes we receive through the community engagement of People Place Future.

We recently received a presentation from representatives of the Committee for Lorne on their Community Aspirations document ... and I'd like to ensure we have an opportunity for AIDA to present its survey findings and analysis to Councillors. I know we're all getting our heads around the challenges we face as a community, and I think AIDA's survey results will add to this understanding.

Our new Council has been busy with deliberations framing our Draft Budget for 2021-22.

It was helpful to have received a letter from Charlotte drawing our attention to two matters – top shops drainage and heritage assessment for the lighthouse precinct.

The Draft Budget is scheduled to go to Council's 27 April meeting and to be open for public comment until 27 May.

Council's focus on Climate Emergency Response is continuing and we are excited to have recently formed our Community Climate Mobiliser Program group. This group brings together the skills and enthusiasm of like-minded people who will participate in workshops and skill-building activities and lead community conversations on Climate Emergency. The end aim for them is to develop our community Climate Emergency response.

A call for expressions of interest has resulted in 20 passionate and motivated people nominating and being accepted to be part of the program. That group includes four people from Aireys.

All applications for the program were really strong, with a broad representation from across the shire. Members are spread from the 18 to over-55 age brackets and bring a diverse range of skills and strengths ... from experience with grass roots community and business climate action, to work and study experience in the climate field, to involvement with local environmental, landcare and community organisations.

All are very eager to start, with the first workshop kicking off on 20 April and wider community engagement during May. I'm really looking forward to meeting the group then and seeing this proactive community-focused response evolve. AIDA's survey results reflected how important it is for community to lead change, and our Council is committed to supporting people to do this.

The Community Mobiliser Program runs alongside several other components of Council's comprehensive Climate Emergency response, which also includes:

- Commitment to carbon neutral operations by 2030, requiring offsetting of emissions.
- We are on track to having 100 per cent of Council's electricity uses to be from renewable sources by 1 July.
- Our Corporate Climate Emergency Response Plan is due to be finalised in coming months, and a number of initiatives are already underway, and
- We are working on updating and verifying our greenhouse gas emissions profile for Council operations, so we can better understand and report on major emissions sources from our community services and facilities.

I am sure you will all agree it is critical work.

Council's waste collection reforms are continuing to be embedded, and I hope you are all embracing the new fourth bin and Food Organics and Garden Organics – FOGO – collection. The fourth bin with the purple lid is for glass only and helps avoid contamination of other recyclables. Putting food waste in with garden organics significantly reduces waste being sent to landfill, and creates a resource – compost – for use by farmers. The first two months of the new four-bin system have produced some significant results.

- Landfill waste is down by approximately 300 tonnes, or 33 per cent on the same time last year.
- Approximately 350 tonnes of glass has been collected for local processing and use, and

- Resource recovery rates from the kerbside system – which includes FOGO, glass and mixed recycling – are at 75 per cent compared without our previous 55 per cent.

So the changes appear to be bringing some significant results. And judging by a landslide of public opinion, the rollout of our accompanying Surf Coast Rubbish and Recycling App – SCRRApp – has been a hit. I hope you've all downloaded it and given it a try.

I'm personally loving that SCRRApp tells me which bin goes out when, what goes in them, and it can provide answers to all sorts of questions. The volume of positive feedback on social media has been amazing, and we have now had 5540 downloads of the app across the shire, including about 470 in the wider Aireys Inlet area.

I am also pleased to recognise that redevelopment of the tennis hit-up wall at Anderson Roadknight Reserve is now complete. This project has been a good partnership between Council and the Aireys Inlet and District Tennis Club, with the club funding the new hit-up panels and engaging a local contractor for installation.

Council has helped with the project delivery and from our renewal budget completed work including demolishing an existing wall. Asset handover is now underway.

This work has rejuvenated a structure which has been in poor condition and it will now serve the club and community for many years to come.

The Aireys hall committee is also in the process of selecting an artist for a new art work at the front of the hall ... they have shortlisted three artists from the Surf Coast and the plan is for works to be complete by the end of the year. The piece will be on or in front of the large west wall of the hall and I hope it creates a more vibrant entrance while showcasing some amazing work of an artist from our region.

That concludes my snapshot from Council. If you have any questions, Cr Gary Allen and I will do our best to respond or follow up on anything that's needed.