



Batemans Bay Performance and Exhibition Centre  
Working Group Inc.

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## NEWSLETTER NO. 24 SEPTEMBER 2015



Dear PerfEx Members and supporters

Since our last Newsletter in March, although you may not have heard too much from us, we have been busily working behind the scenes. As you are aware, without raising the \$millions ourselves, PerfEx is very much reliant on Council for our future as far as a suitable site for a Performing Arts Centre in Batemans Bay is concerned. You will remember that for some time now, along with the Chamber of Commerce and others, we have been urging the Eurobodalla Shire Council to purchase the defunct Bowling Club site which is fantastically situated and already set up for our cultural needs (with room for improvements over time). Such a building could provide a wonderful cultural spirit for our town and Shire. However, PerfEx has to be mindful that a sale between the Catalina Golf Club (the owners of the Bowling Club) and the Eurobodalla Shire Council, is a commercial decision and we do not want the responsibility on our heads of the ratepayers committing to overspend on the purchase.

A flurry of activity in early July was instigated by a letter written by PerfEx Member Sue Mackenzie to the Bay Post suggesting Catalina Club donate or sell the Bowling Club to the Community for a Cultural Centre, to give the town a 'heart'. The letter prompted Jen Hunt of ABC Radio Bega to call me to ask where PerfEx was in its progress towards a Performing Arts Centre and whether we would like the Bowling Club? Carmen McIntosh, Editor of The Bay Post heard this interview and that same morning asked me for comment for an article she was doing on the Bowling Club with Allan Rutherford, President of the Chamber, calling for Club Catalina to have reasonable expectations regarding the price tag. There was a wonderful photo of Allan standing underneath the 'For Sale' sign outside the Bowling Club.

Carmen McIntosh also set up an online poll. The result of which was that 70% of voters were in favour of having a Cultural Centre at the Bowling Club. A few letters of support to the Bay Post followed on from this.

Around this time, Bob Kolderie, our Treasurer and I attended an excellent Business and Community evening hosted by Adult Education where I met the CEO Anthony Mayne. (PerfEx had always had a good relationship with and support from, Anthony's predecessor Rhonnie South). I was very impressed with Anthony's passion, belief and future thinking for his organisation, so arranged to meet him again with a view to Anthony joining our lobby group, consisting of myself, Allan Rutherford and David MacLahlan and Harvey Doberer of the Batemans Bay Swimming Club. (I had introduced these people to you in our March Newsletter and also explained that a Business Plan, which included a cultural centre for the Bowling Club had been presented to Council). It seemed to me that Education and Training would fit in and complement the other

activities. Anthony was very keen on this idea, especially as he wanted to progress tourism courses.

I must stress the wonderful thing is, that first and foremost, these people with whom I am working, want the same thing; an Arts and Cultural Centre for the Bay at the Bowling Club site. Also, the more conversations we have, we realise the growing support we have from within Community: Rotary Club support us for instance, as well as the wider business community. There have even been offers from builders to help us renovate the Club! PerfEx is no longer working on its own, which is such a weight off our shoulders!

As we had heard that Council were having some discussions about the Bowling Club, we thought it imperative to have a Proposal drawn up. We did this and met with all the Councillors whom we could and emailed a copy of our Proposal to those who couldn't fit meetings into their schedules. There has been mixed reaction to this proposal, but overall a positive response, cost being the overriding factor.

In summary our proposal envisages a Council owned facility with central management and leased areas. The current auditorium, with some tweaking to the acoustics (there are those who understand it much better than I), would suffice very well for the present time. There is room for both wet and dry workshop spaces and meeting rooms for U3A, for instance. There is also ample gallery space for both local and visiting artists. In time, it is proposed that one of the bowling greens would be the site of a new totally multi-purpose space, which, with removable stage and seating, could provide for events as diverse as orchestral performances, a 'Wiggles' show or a National Tupperware convention!

We propose that the Tourist Information Centre be moved to the site, which makes so much sense with ample parking for cars and caravans. It also gives Council the opportunity to sell the current Tourist Information Centre site and possibly the Community Centre site. An Oyster Interpretive Centre has also been mooted, as part of the growing and very exciting Oyster Trail Tourism project. Adult Education would like to expand and have a 'hands on' tourism focus. It would mean that the complex was alive with people of all ages, on a daily basis.

With the addition of the Indoor Aquatic Centre (there's plenty of space on the greens, even for grandstand seating for Regional Carnivals), the centre becomes totally integrated. There's space for a gym and child care which swimming pool operators need to give them a viable business model.

With a commercial kitchen and restaurant already in place, this could serve as a central catering facility.

What we are suggesting is that the building does not have to be pulled down and multi-millions spent. Of course the Aquatic

Centre is expensive and would need Federal and/or State funding, but the other activities can boost the buildings' viability and even give Council a return on their investment.

It is also essential that any organisation which wants to be involved in this exciting project, comes on board to work with and support us, as it is only with a cohesive community effort, that we will succeed.

With Federal Elections only 12 months away, Dr Peter Hendy will also be given a copy of the Proposal in the hope that this particular wide-ranging community project will be one that he might find worthy of supporting..

It is no secret that there has been disarray within the Catalina Club and that a new Board might be more amenable to discussions about off-loading the Bowling Club to ease their financial burden, so all I can say, is watch this space!



### **Soldiers Club**

On 15th July Mayor Lindsay Brown called me to say he was having a meeting on Friday 22nd with the new Soldiers' Club CEO to discuss their strategic planning and thought it might be good for me to attend and he asked if Dave Harding could go along. Dave was unavailable so I asked committee member Doug Bindon-Howell to come with me.

We met at the Soldiers' Club and present were the Mayor, Lindsay Brown, Deputy Mayor Rob Pollock, Cathy Arthur, ESC Director of Community, Arts & Recreational Services, Paul Biddlestone, Soldiers Club CEO, Matt his assistant, Dougie and myself.

Basically, the Soldiers' Club is looking at its long term plans and drawing up a Master Plan. Nothing is going to happen for a while as in 2020 their 9 year lease of BayLink to the Government expires and, with a large debt, they're not spending any money in the meantime.

Paul Biddlestone is anxious to move away from the Poker Machine perception and be more community minded. Indeed most Clubs are realizing they have to change their image to stay relevant in a changing world. Paul is very keen to promote Music Festivals and the like and to be supportive of, and to work with, the wider community.

I was invited to present PerfEx' needs and position, so I talked briefly about the PerfEx history, the findings of the Arts' Infrastructure report, Hanging Rock, etc mainly for Paul's sake and brought up the fact that we were currently prodding Council to purchase the Bowling Club. The Mayor told us the Bowling Club was too expensive and that there's no Government funding for the Arts at present. Rob Pollock backed him up on the Arts' Funding position, but on the whole, was much more supportive of us.

The Mayor had called this meeting in the hope that the Club might be able to fulfil our needs as far as providing for the Performing and Visual Arts'. At our next Committee meeting, there was an overwhelming vote not to follow this suggestion, although we wish the Soldiers' Club and Paul Biddlestone every success!

The Council has to provide arts facilities for Batemans Bay, as found and committed to after the 2010 Arts' Infrastructure Report. It is a very sad fact that five years down the track, the sole dedicated community Arts' facility in a town of nearly 20,000 (and the majority

of the Shire's ratepayers) is still one small gallery attached to the Tourist Information Centre, and the suggestion that our Cultural needs can be fulfilled by the RSL Club, is quite frankly, a pretty poor indictment of an intelligent population! On the other hand, Moruya, at less than half of our population, has the Mechanics Institute, the RSL Hall which Council leases, the Arts' Cottage by the river and Council is about to spend over \$2m on an extension of the Moruya library for Gallery space and meeting rooms. I'm not saying that Moruya shouldn't have these facilities, but the Bay certainly deserves far better acknowledgment of our cultural needs!

### **Sally Carr**

It is with sadness that I report the passing of Sally Carr who gave up the long struggle in June. Sally joined PerfEx soon after our formation in 2007 and as a former art teacher, she held the ambitions of PerfEx very dear to her heart.

### **AGM and New Member**

Our AGM at the end of May at my place, saw 14 people in and around my dining room table – the most attendees we've ever had at an AGM, which was just great! Needless to say, there was plenty of discussion. The Committee has increased by one with the welcome addition of Doug Bindon-Howell who brings a wealth of experience to the group.

Since that time, we also extend a warm welcome to new member Primi Thompson.

Our financial membership is now down to 38, from the heady days of 75 or so. But eight years is a long time to ask people to keep the faith and we are endlessly grateful to those who have and to those new members who have more recently come on board to support the cause.

Until next time, wishing you all a PerfEx spring season!  
Jeannie Brewer

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