

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year



The
Cockfighter



**BROKE
FORDWICH**
WINE REGION

The tranquil side of the Hunter Valley

December 2018.



**'WEEKENDA'
HOLIDAY
ACCOMMODATION
OPENS IN BROKE
FORDWICH**

**CLIMATE CHANGING THE
TASTE OF WINE**

HOW NOT TO LEAD A HORSE TO WATER

Broke Fordwich Rainfall
November 48.5 mm
Year to date 323 mm

BY now, the inhabitants of our little drought-menaced subregion could be excused for anticipating some tangible activity involving the Singleton Council master plan for potable water connection. It would seem, rather, that Council worthies have seriously underestimated the community reaction to the extortionate connection fees that have been mooted

the mines and held by the Council (as well as the windfall from Council's abject surrender of Wallaby Scrub Road) could well be allocated to the connection expense for the homes involved. It's pretty simple really—with decades of coal-dust and other nasties whirling around our environment from the mines, is it not reasonable

and sewage project, with this slug over and above the Voluntary Planning Agreement amount of \$11-million. Who moved the goal-posts?

A meeting between the Council and the mining company agreed to delete the sewer and retain the water supply. The Bulga Mil-

Another nail in the Council coffin of public trust and accountability can be measured by the laughable inclusion of Bulga in their general scorecard of positive property enhancement by dint of town water supply.

for this scheme.

Different estimates from different landholders, of course, but tens of thousands of dollars in some cases (many of us have quite a stretch between the road and the house) have proved a major deterrent overall. As many have observed, such sums cover hundreds and hundreds of Wetawi's excellent emergency drops—in my case, I have had recourse to truckloads of aqua pura less than a dozen times in nearly 20 years as a Bulgarian.

The bigger issue is the fact that money sourced from

that an infinitesimal slice of their grotesque gains over those years go to replacing the polluted tank-and-dam infrastructure which is all we have ever known?

Critics may well dismiss these concerns as 'just another anti-Local Government rant.' Not, I suggest, as long as you can take a trek along that long, sinister road that led to the expansion of Mount Thorley Warkworth. At two meetings before this fateful cave-in, the Council and the Planning Advisory Commission charged the mine with financing a water

brodale Progress Association reminds us that the original spirit of the PAC-Council deal was for this infrastructure to be outside of the VPA.

Another nail in the Council coffin of public trust and accountability can be measured by the laughable inclusion of Bulga in their general scorecard of positive property enhancement by dint of town water supply. Not Bulga, dear Councillors, as any fool can plainly see: as the mine nears, with the once protected Saddle Ridge assuming the dimensions of the

Continued page 6

HOLIDAY MANAGEMENT GROUP LOOKING AFTER BROKE FORDWICH PROPERTIES

“I like people and when my job is helping them enjoy their holiday experience then that makes it fun for me.”

Weekenda owner Pete Smith was excited when the opportunity came for he and his wife Anne have been running an accommodation booking and management company for over 10 years.

“Recently we were fortunate enough to take over the management of several Broke Fordwich properties. This was so exciting for us because we’ve been watching

the growth of the region for some time and were really impressed with what the area had to offer in the way of its locality, the scenery and the places available to stay,” Pete said.

The company caters for two category of clients - the holiday maker and the property owner.

For holiday makers, *Weekenda* provides an easy on-line booking system.

For property owners *Weekenda* offers the convenience of having their property

managed from bookings to bed linen to cleaning and care taking.

Weekenda manages holiday rental properties all over New South Wales. They have many properties in the Hunter Valley region, with the list of properties extending along the coast as far north as Wallis Island and as far south as Sussex Inlet including homes in the Blue Mountains and Snowy mountains.

For more information:
weekenda.com.au



This delightful pizza oven bake-out is part of holiday accommodation, *Roviana* which is one of three wonderful offerings on River Flats Estate - *Carinya* featured on the cover and *Tara Cottage* below



Above: Tara Cottage one of three stays available on River Flats.



Echo Hill 5 bedroom accommodation on large acreage and vineyard



Rosa house (above) and Rosamund house (below) are on Rosamund Hill Estate both with 5 bedrooms and 2 bathrooms and next door to Greenway Cellar Door



From the Editor - continued from page 2

surrounding moonscape, you can almost hear the value of your domicile dropping with every grinding, crashing bite the shovel mauls from our environment. Ask any real estate agent.

Summarising, as dithering

goes and the unaffordability of Council's plans becomes more transparent, I feel that a 'wetter' forecast is not on for our little patch of paradise—not because, as Council has suggested, we are apathetic and opposed

the original proposal, but (to paraphrase The Ancient Mariner)

*Water, water, everywhere
And not a drop to drink
Dollars, dollars everywhere
Into John Street parking
sink.*

*Milbrodale and Bulga hit
Council*

*With their 'mine-to-pay' no-
tion*

Response?

As idle as a painted ship

Upon a painted ocean.

*(Tom Jackson with
apologies to Samuel Taylor
Coleridge)*



JAZZ IN THE VINEYARDS - 24th November 2018

GRAPEVINE GATHERING – 1st December 2018

A DAY ON THE GREEN (John Farnham) - 1st December 2018

SHANIA TWAIN - 8th December 2018

THE RED HOT SUMMER TOUR 2019 - 2nd February 2019

RNB VINE DAYS - 2nd February 2019

JOHN BUTLER TRIO & MISSY HIGGINS - 16th February 2019

RED HOT CHILLI PEPPERS - 23 February 2019

KYLIE - 16th March 2019

WINE MACHINE - 23rd March 2019

A LITTLE BIT OF ITALY IN BROKE 13 & 14 April 2019

Lifestream

body treatments



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hot stone massage
sports massage
pregnancy massage
deep tissue massage
aromatherapy massage

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Lifestream

PH 0425 242 257

130 HILL ST BROKE - CARMEN COOPER

Climate change ‘creeping up’ on winemakers and putting pressure on grapes



Winemaker Bruce Redman says they have seen distinct climate differences in the various decades, and the past 18 years had tended to be drier and warmer. (Supplied: Redman Wines)

Hotter, drier summers mean many wine grape growers have to harvest their grapes earlier, resulting in riper wines with higher alcohol content.

Compressed vintages are a real challenge through the wine production chain and many growers are having to change grape varieties as average temperatures rise.

Master of wine Rob Geddes has tasted more than 5,000 over the past year for the

publication of the 2019 Australian Wine Vintages book, an independent review.

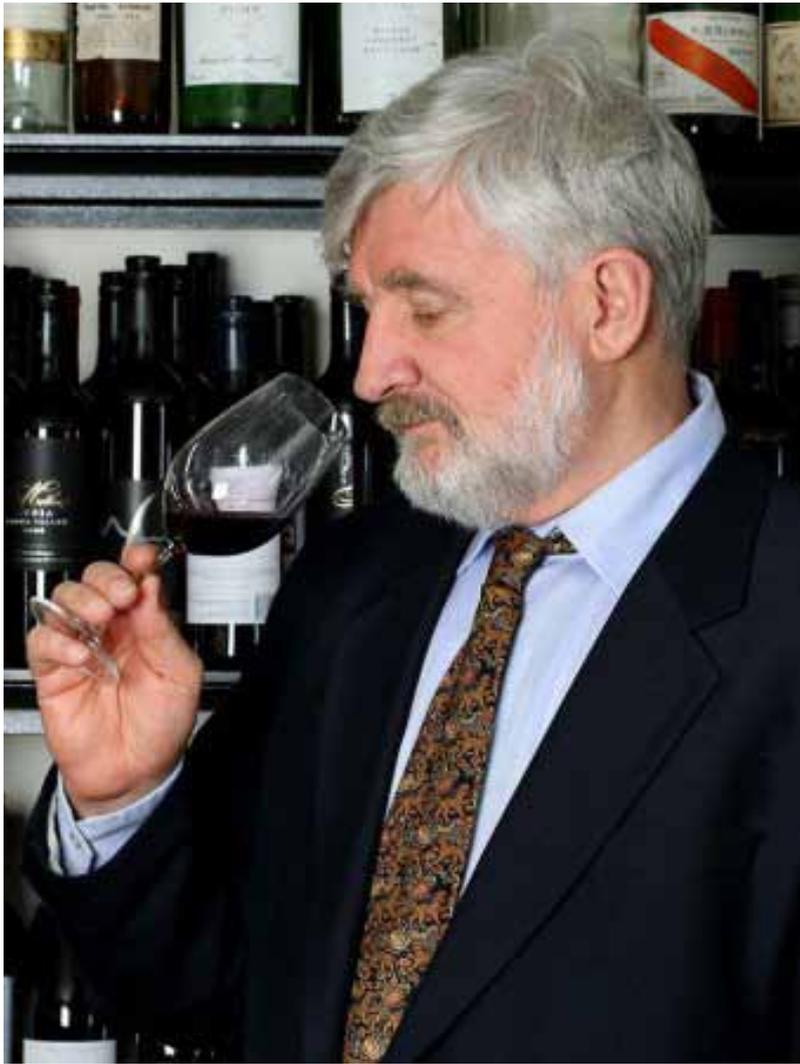
Mr Geddes said that, due to climate change, wines were riper and richer and had higher alcohol content and that impacted upon the style of wine.

“The climate change issue is one of sudden heat spikes as well as continuing heat and high temperatures and that is an issue,” he said.

“We are seeing higher alcohols and this is the result of ripeness and also, to a degree, the result of some berry shrivel, depending on the grower.

“We were tasting one day and the wines that were 14.5 per cent of alcohol ... a lot of them were actually 15.5 [per cent alcohol].

“Alcohol at 11 per cent versus alcohol at 12.5 per cent versus 15 per cent is the biggest way for a consumer



Rob Geddes says Australian wines are richer and riper and have higher alcohol content due to warmer temperatures.

(Supplied Rob Geddes)

to judge body.”

Winemaker Bruce Redman of Redman Wines in Coonawarra, South Australia, has been involved in the wine industry for more than 40 years.

He said they had seen distinct climate differences in the various decades, and the past 18 years had tended to be drier and warmer.

“If we get too much warm

weather and our vintage comes forward too much and we start harvesting too early then obviously, the grapes are going to be riper and there will be different characteristics in the wine,” he said.

“What we are finding is that we are getting pretty similar characteristics in terms of aromas and flavours, but we are tending to find that in the past 20-odd years the alcohols have probably tended to creep up from around 13 to 13.5 to 14 per cent by volume.

“With the slightly higher alcohol you tend to get a slightly sweeter mid-palate and perhaps a little bit of a richer style of wine, which isn’t necessarily a bad thing.”

What can growers do to adapt to climate change?

Emeritus Professor of plant science and viticulture Stephen Tyerman from the University of Adelaide said the impact of climate change

“We are seeing higher alcohols and this is the result of ripeness and also, to a degree, the result of some berry shrivel, depending on the grower.”



Berry Shriveling is a cell death phenomenon believed to be caused by high temperatures and water stress. (Supplied: Stephen Tyerman)

was a double whammy.

He said grapes were not only developing earlier and ripening in a hotter time of the year, allowing the sugars to accumulate more rapidly, temperatures were rising and putting further pressure on the grapes.

“They [wine grape growers] should be very concerned about climate change; it’s insidious the way it is creeping

up on us,” Dr Tyerman said.

An additional challenge for growers was berry shrivel, occurring when the cells inside the grape start to die, reducing the grape’s capacity to hold water.

“This cell death phenomenon occurs in many wine grape varieties but it’s very prominent in shiraz,” Dr Tyerman said.

“So high temperatures and

water stress both induce this cell death phenomena in the berry.”

He said the stages of grape development were very sensitive to temperatures and depended on the grape varieties and advised selecting varieties more tolerant of higher temperatures.

Dr Tyerman said there were different techniques to adapt to warmer temperatures,

“They [wine grape growers] should be very concerned about climate change; it’s insidious the way it is creeping up on us,”

although many were still in a trial stage.

of Ricca Terra Farms, Ashley Radcliff, grows 35 different varieties at their vineyards.



Ashley Radcliff is growing 35 different varieties of vines that he feels are better suited to the warmer climate. (Supplied: Ricca Terra Farms)

He suggested using water to mist into the canopies to cool down them down during heatwaves.

“Shading is a big deal,” he said.

“If you want to put in overhead shading, that’s a big expense but it does have a big impact to reduce some of the negative effects of high temperatures.”

Mediterranean varieties

Owner and general manager

“My view is that climate change is happening and that’s why we have planted so many different varieties,” he said.

“Our focus has been on southern Italian varieties and Portuguese and Spanish varieties that we feel are better suited to a warmer climate.”

Mr Radcliff said the main growers in the Riverland of South Australia had adapted to heat waves by growing larger canopies and planting varieties on certain rootstocks that were more drought tolerant.

“Where the heat spikes can cause problems is actually in the final wine, so you need to make sure that during the heat spikes your vines are well prepared.

“You get a good canopy and you have ample water.”

Water concerns

Dr Tyerman said water would become a big problem and he expected droughts to become a lot more frequent and intense.

“We have to be a lot more careful in how we regulate irrigation but it’s not to say that we can’t,” he said.

Mr Redman said having to irrigate vines in Coonawarra at the end of the growing season had become the norm.

“About 20 years ago, most seasons we didn’t need to irrigate at all or in fact a lot in Coonawarra was dryland,” he said.

“Now almost 100 per cent of Coonawarra has some sort of supplementary irrigation to make sure to keep the canopies nice and green up until harvest time.

“We are cognisant of the fact that [global warming] is happening and are looking at different management practices to help negate the effect.”

ABC Rural

Jessica Schremmer

RUNNING HORSE WINES



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FURTHER INCREASE IN SALES TO CHINA SURPRISES WINEMAKERS

China has again shown its dominance as Australia's most valuable wine market, with new figures showing export value into China increased by 42 per cent in the past 12 months.



Yalumba managing director Nick Waterman, in South Australia's Barossa Valley, said the sustainable growth of exports had proven surprising.

"I think there was a lot of

Wine Australia's export report shows total exports to Greater China hit \$853 million in value, which is significantly higher than the next-best United States on \$461 million.

Total Australian wine exports also showed substantial growth across the board from the 12 months ending September 2017, with value growing 13 per cent to hit \$2.44 billion and just under 800 million litres in volume.

Wine Australia chief executive Andreas Clark said the rise of the Chinese market in particular had been significant for the local industry.

"The story in China has been quite remarkable," he said.

"There is a real emerging wine culture ... there is still a long way to go in China.

"It is all part of the trend to westernisation that is happening there, and exploring

new ways of living."

Shiraz popular with consumers

Red wine varieties were once again a big winner, accounting for 74 per cent of export value and outperforming white wine domestically.

Mr Clark said Australian red varieties, including the popular shiraz, had struck a chord with Chinese consumers.

"Red wine resonates strongly in the China market, and it is over 90 per cent of our exports," he said.

"The success we have had is because we have really worked hard in the market.

"We had seven years of negative value growth, so in the last three years we have been in positive growth territory."

Ferngrove has pursued a unique approach to marketing its wine in China

expectation in general by the wine industry, but I think most people would not have predicted such exponential growth," he said.

"It is moving from what has traditionally been seen as a healthy option, and now it is becoming more of a lifestyle option as well.

"As the country's population becomes wealthier, we are seeing it move away from the five-star hotels and tier one cities, and into the general restaurant trade."

Despite trailing more traditional markets like the United States and the United Kingdom, Mr Waterman said the growth in China looked likely to take out top spot for his winemaker in the coming years.

"I envisage within the foreseeable future it will become the largest market for us by value," he said.

OUR WILDLIFE



Channel – Billed Cuckoo (*Scythrops novachollandiae*)

Also known as the rain bird.

Huge pale grey cuckoo with large, curved, straw coloured beak, red skin around eye, tail with dark terminal band, tipped with white. Immature birds are paler, no red around the eye, and scalloped buff on wings. Single pairs or small flocks, very shy and keeps to heads of leafy figs; harassed by other birds; often first noticed by call, Flight strong, hawk like, with regular beats, often high up like a flying cross. Reclaimed juveniles are sometimes seen with adult pairs.

They are raucous, repeated, rising shout ‘oik’ or ‘awk’; flying or perched; often at night. They live in rain forest, open forest and woodland. Breeds from August until December. They lay up to 5 buff, blotched, purplish brown eggs in other bird’s nests including the Magpie, Currawong and magpie and crow. Channel Bills leave the raising of their young chicks to the host parent then reclaim them once they are flying.

They are summer breeding migrants from Indonesia –PNG widespread in Queensland and NSW.

Channel – Bills arrive in Australia August – September and depart March – April.

I love the sounds these birds as it nearly always means there is rain on the way

We have had calls about huge cuckoo chicks being attacked by Magpies or even Willy Wagtails where in fact they are feeding the Cuckoo chicks.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Elizabeth

“Joeys Retreat”



BULGA WATER SUPPLY PLANS CAUSE PROBLEMS FOR LOCALS

Hedweld founder Ian Hedley and Bulga resident, has built a multimillion-dollar mining engineering business over the last few decades and is a consistent supporter and advocate of the Bulga community.

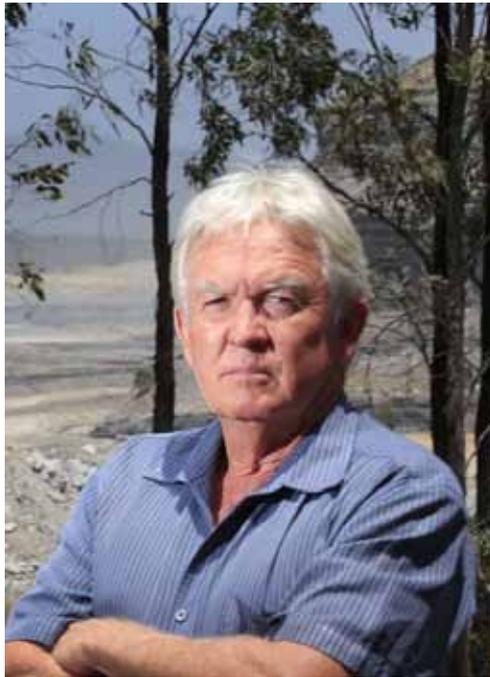
When several millions of dollars were made available to the Bulga area as part of the local mining companies' recompensation scheme, Mount Thorley Warkworth Voluntary Planning Agreement (MTW VPA), some of the funds were ear-tagged to supply town water to the area.

Singleton Council took responsibility to distribute the funds and the following letter from Ian to Paul McKoy, Project Engineer, Water and Sewer Network sums up the problematic progress of the funding. Following Ian's letter is a press release from Singleton Council

"Good Afternoon Paul

I find it disappointing that you are giving less than two working days of notification to the community of an agenda item that will go before council at Mondays Singleton Council's ordinary meeting on Monday 19 No-

vember 2018. The reason for this is the fact that the residents of the Bulga region are unaware of what you propose to present to Council. We would hope that it is not



Hedweld founder and CEO Ian Hedley "....tax payer monies squandered on an inappropriate project that fails to address the wider community's real needs."

what you put forward at the last community information evening, as to feedback I have received, this proposal was not generally acceptable to the majority of residents.

For the residence of the Bulga and wider region, this is an important project that has not been well managed by Singleton Council employees. While I accept that you cannot please everyone, there has already been

way too many bad decisions made by Singleton Council in relation to this project.

Please allow me to list such blunders;

The first public meeting at Bulga Community Hall where false information on the proposed scheme was publicly presented and it was very obvious that the Council employee tasked with this presentation was either ill-informed or unqualified in this subject. The presentation of the proposed scheme contained untruths that were identified by Bulga residence and subsequently this project was scrapped in favour of a second proposed project.

Before Bulga residents were consulted, a second project was embarked on by Singleton Council employees which saw the Singleton Council purchasing vacant land opposite side of the road from the Bulga Tavern for a water source and water treatment plant. Was a consultant paid for this blunder? I hope not as they only had to ask a local if there was water on that site to find out that this project was doomed to fail.

Then there is another new proposal that has been

shared with the residents, and that is to bring water from Mount Thorley Industrial area. I have a business in the industrial area that is already negatively affected by low water pressure and insufficient water supply for emergency firefighting water supply. This has forced landowners in the Mount Thorley Industrial Area to put in water storage and booster pumping equipment at their

Bulga regional residents that have their drinking water extremely negatively impacted by dust from the nearby Yancoal Mine.

I also wish to advise you that, to my knowledge, that there are only two privately owned properties left in the Bulga village that are not owned by Yancoal. Those being our family home and that of our next door neighbour. With the current pro-

ject has been prolonged by poor decisions, that Singleton Councillors will consider the wider Bulga community and contribute some of their retained MTW VPA monies or the proceeds of the closure of Wallaby Scrub Road that both have had significant negative impact on the Bulga regions community.

Unfortunately I am still travelling home from overseas and will not be available

“...the only winners have been the consultants who have been paid ... \$500,000.00 to come up with three failed projects”

own expense. For my company Hedweld, the cost of compulsory booster pumps and water storage now exceeds one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000.00). Has this proposed project been researched adequately, or is this another project doomed to fail. I question the wisdom of this latest ridiculous scheme.

From a personal opinion, I can not understand how a very effective private irrigation scheme (the PID) can be built and maintained by private consortium to supply irrigation quantities of water to a large area south and west of Singleton and Council cannot provide a relatively small project to

posals as presented at the last Singleton Council presentation at Bulga Community Centre, it would appear that the only real winners of this latest proposal will be Yancoal.

It is my understanding that Singleton Council has had Government funding for this project for a number of years and to date the only winners have been the consultants who have been paid handsomely (to the tune of five hundred thousand dollars, yes \$500,000.00) to come up with three failed proposed projects. Do Councillor's approve this excessive waste of tax payer money?

I do hope that, despite the excessive time that this pro-

posal as presented at the last Singleton Council presentation at Bulga Community Centre, it would appear that the only real winners of this latest proposal will be Yancoal. It is my understanding that Singleton Council has had Government funding for this project for a number of years and to date the only winners have been the consultants who have been paid handsomely (to the tune of five hundred thousand dollars, yes \$500,000.00) to come up with three failed proposed projects. Do Councillor's approve this excessive waste of tax payer money?

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Continued next page

therefore the project should not be determined by Local Government employees that are isolated from regional communities concerns. I would once again ask that consideration be given to local concerns and that you personally make yourself available to meet with the regions residents to discuss this matter before it is dealt with by Council. I am happy to organise this meeting if required.

I trust that the Singleton Council will consider the needs of the Bulga communities future requirements in relation to a reliable source of clean and affordable water.

Regards,
Ian”

Singleton Council: Detailed designs to be drawn for Bulga Water Supply

Detailed designs for the Bulga Water Supply project will be undertaken after a preferred route for the transfer water main between Broke

and Bulga was decided at last night’s ordinary meeting of Singleton Council.

Community consultation, particularly with the Milbrodale community, will also continue while a date for construction is dependent on further grant funding for the estimated \$11.3 million project.

A report to the meeting said Council received a 50 per cent funding contribution for the Bulga Water Supply Scheme for up to \$1.4 million in February 2017, however issues identified in the planning phase had resulted in cost implications for the project.

Community workshops held in September also raised concerns about the cost of the base charge and construction of service lines to dwellings to connect to potable water supply.

Katie Hardy, Council’s Manager Water and Sewer, said the outcome from last night’s meeting paved the next steps in the future of the project.

Two options for the route for the transfer water main were presented Councillors, with Option A covering 9.7 kilometres between Mount Thorley and Bulga (servicing 108 properties under the entire scheme) and Option

B covering 14.8 kilometres between Broke and Bulga (servicing 186 properties under the entire scheme).

“Following last night’s resolution, Council staff will now proceed to engage a consultant to undertake detailed designs for the Broke to Bulga option, based on the number properties served and associated economic and other benefits,” she said.

“Cost estimates have put the cost of the project at \$11.3 million, including a 30 per cent contingency, and the simple fact is Council cannot afford to fund the project without passing on additional rate increases or taking additional loans.

“That’s why the resolution included deferring construction until Council can secure additional grant funding to help cover the considerable cost, and for Council to work with State Government agencies to identify and apply for appropriate grand funding.

“There will also be ongoing community consultation, particularly with the people of Milbrodale, who could connect to the water network under Option B.”



BROKE COMMUNITY CHRISTMAS CAROLS

**Sunday 16th December
From 5.00pm
Broke Recreation Grounds
Cochrane Street Broke**

MUSIC - SAUSAGE SIZZLE - SOFT DRINKS
GLOW STICKS - JUMPING CASTLE - SANTA

BYO PICNIC RUGS, CHAIRS AND NIBBLES



BIG OIL AND GAS PRODUCER WOODSIDE CALLING FOR A CARBON PRICE

Woodside boss Peter Coleman says the time for Australia to act on climate change is now

Woodside has joined other resource giants BHP and Rio Tinto in calling for change

Mr Coleman says individual companies may help change broader corporate resistance to a carbon price

Speaking on the ABC's *The Business*, chief executive

“A market-based carbon price could minimise the costs of a low carbon transition by making clear the marginal cost of reducing emissions across all sources.”

Peter Coleman said the time to act on climate change was now.

“We need a price on carbon, we need to ensure that the most effective energy gets into the system,” he said.

“Our legacy needs to be one that both our children and our grandchildren are proud that their parents gave to them and that opportunity is now, so we think there is a will to act, the time is now, and we need to start having good policy debate.”



Woodside boss Peter Coleman: “We need a price on carbon, we need to ensure that the most effective energy gets into the system.”

It is a major reversal from the company's stance several years ago, when it's then-chief Don Volte campaigned against the Gillard government's emissions pricing

scheme.

Mr Coleman's stance will likely make for some awkward conversations at the Business Council where he sits on the board.

The council was another very vocal critic of Australia's previous carbon price, but Mr Coleman said he wouldn't be trying to change the council's stance.

“I accept that the Business Council represents many, many members with diverse views both in the resources

sector and manufacturers, so I am not going to talk about where the Business Council is going with this,” he said.

“We think it is time for Woodside to step up, we think it

is time for industry to step up, it is difficult for industry associations to do that themselves.

“Hopefully by coming out and talking about this in a very clear and thoughtful way there will be others that will come behind us and say yes, we are of the same view and we will start to develop momentum over time.”

Rio Tinto's boss Jean Sebastien Jacques told *The Business* in late October that the company remains steadfast in its support of putting a price on emissions.

“Our policy has not changed. We believe in climate

change, we believe in carbon pricing,” he said.

“We will convey our message to whoever is in power in Australia, in the US, in Canada and in China to make sure that our views are well understood. We want as a part of the mining industry to be a part of the solution to climate change.”

In the same week BHP released a report stating that a “market-based carbon price could minimise the costs of a low carbon transition by making clear the marginal cost of reducing emissions across all sources.”

Last week software billionaire Mike Cannon-Brookes, who has started a social media storm with his campaign for a clean energy future titled “#fairdinkumpower”, is also planning to push for a carbon price.

“The biggest kind of thing we can do I guess is put in place a carbon price,” he told ABC’s 7.30 program.

“Regardless what you think of that science, if we wait to see if the scientists are right or not, it will be too late to act. So, prudence dictates that we think about what contribution we can make, individually and collectively, to mitigating the effects of climate change.”

A great night out Bingo



*Christmas Bingo
December 3rd*

Lots of prizes

*@ 6:30 Bulga Community
Centre*

All welcome

Contact

Phil Reid 0438 865 064

Bring a plate to share



Singleton Evangelical Church

is a genuine community of people from all cultures, ages and walks of life. Not just for Singleton residents, but for all those who want to hear God's word and share the amazing impacts of His love. You are most welcome to come along to Sunday Church 9:30am at Singleton Public School, Elizabeth St, or even try one of our smaller groups or Youth Groups.

For more information 6573-4198
or www.singletonchurch.org



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"IN-SYNC" Adverb; simultaneously, at once, at the same time, in concert, concurrently, all together.

The robot that staves off loneliness for chronically ill children

A Norwegian startup company has created an automaton that helps children with long-term sickness be part of normal life again

As a rule of thumb, the best ideas are the simplest. That's

Dolva, a 26-year-old who studied computer science and interaction design at Oslo University, is not one of them. She and her two co-founders – Marius Aabel and Matias Doyle – are all about utility. As their com-

interplay and group dynamics that are a critical part of school life.

Dolva realised just how important and neglected this issue of social solitude was when she met a woman who



easy to forget in an age of rapid technological innovation, when the tendency is to be led by capability rather than need.

For as Karen Dolva, co-founder of the Norwegian startup *No Isolation*, says: “There are a lot of engineers who don’t want to make something useful – they want to make something cool.”

pany name suggests, they are looking to end human isolation. It’s a massive undertaking, but they’ve started with a distinct and overlooked group: sick children.

When a child suffers a long-term or chronic illness, one of the greatest psychological problems they confront is isolation from their peers and schoolmates. It’s possible to keep up with schoolwork, but not the social

lost her teenage daughter to cancer. She and her partners researched the problem, speaking to children with a multitude of different health conditions and came up with an answer: a telepresence robot called AV1.

A plain white bust, with a vaguely sci-fi robot visage, it was designed to sit on a vacated classroom desk and be the eyes and ears of the sick child at home in bed.

The child can see and hear the teacher and the rotating head of the robot also offers a 360-degree view of the class.

The AV1's head flashes blue when the child wants to ask a question and there is even a whispering mode that enables the child to speak, way out of the teacher's earshot, to a neighbouring classmate.

When I met Dolva in a north London cafe, I tried out the system by speaking, via an AV1, to her colleague in Oslo. By the use of elementary controls on a laptop, I was able to look around the Oslo office and chat to the company secretary.

It's hardly a breakthrough in technology, but the early signs are that it could have profound effect with its target consumers. Just over 200 of the AV1s are being used in Scandinavia, a few in Holland and there is already one user in Britain. In 12 months' time, Dolva expects that figure to be between 2,000 and 4,000.

"I have security now because of AV1," says Jade in an email. "She gave me hope in a very dark time. She has allowed me to make commitments that previously I would have been too worried about not being able to meet.

As a teenager, it is incredibly reassuring to know this assistive technology is available and can help me forge my future."

Jade, who plans to go to university, something she feared she wouldn't be able to do, speaks of AV1 as female, because users tend to award a gender to their robot, as well as customise it. She's even given hers a name – Bee – and its own Facebook page. For someone as housebound as Jade, Bee offers more than a presence in a classroom – she also provides a window on the world at large. Her mother takes Bee for journeys in the car, where she can chat to her daughter, who can see the passing streets, and to coffee shops, where strangers often stop and ask questions.

"The best times I've ever had with Bee have been when I didn't even feel like I was using her," says Jade. "I just felt like I was really there."

For her, the AV1 is useful and cool.

Something like one in a 100 children are away from school for at least two months a year, so the market for AV1 is potentially very large, with around 35,000 pupils fitting the criterion in

the UK alone. Dolva envisages a situation in which schools buy or hire several robots that are transferred between pupils as and when the need arises.

But she's not stopping with sick schoolchildren. The next group she wants to bring out of social isolation is senior citizens. The solution No Isolation is working on, says Dolva, is going to be very different to AV1.

"Kids have a base," she says. "With school, there's a network. You don't necessarily see that with seniors. Of course there are also mobility issues, memory loss and technology fear. Seniors are a much more diverse group. A 12-year-old is very much a 12-year-old. Two 85-year-olds can be extremely different in their motivation and what family they have around them."

Dolva's dream is to end social isolation completely and it doesn't matter how long it takes. This is one startup that is not looking for a quick buy-out.

"It's a problem we've dedicated our lives to," she says, with a tear in her eye. "It's what we're going to be doing for the next 50 years."

Andrew Anthony

The Observer

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The key for the Hut can be picked up at the Broke Village Store with a deposit of \$20.00 which will be returned when the key is returned.



COMMUNITY GROUPS AND ORGANISATIONS

Broke Bulga Landcare Group Inc.

C/o President, Wendy Lawson
PO Box 120, Broke
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Broke Fair Committee

Secretary, Maxine Alexander
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Broke Fordwich Wine & Tourism

President Jody Derrick
Secretary, Mike Wilson
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email huntervalley.team@rfs.nsw.gov.au
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Superintendent Ashley Frank.

Broke Rural Fire Brigade

Captain: Paul Myers
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Broke NSW 2330

Bulga Rural Fire Brigade

Captain: Adrian Gallagher 6574 5100.
Permit officers:
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Kathleen Everett (02)
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Broke Public School

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St Marks Anglican Church

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The Immaculate Conception Catholic Church Broke

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