

Water Still the high priority

Report from Round Table Dinner – ‘Issues to Action’ panel discussion
Tuesday 13 April 2010

Water, its security and sustainability remains the key concern of members of the Committee for Ballarat if discussion at the April Round Table Dinner is any indication.

The dinner held at the Novotel Forest Resort at Creswick attracted around 170 people to hear ABC broadcaster Jon Faine lead a panel discussion on a range of issues confronting the city and region.

The panel was: UFS Dispensaries CEO Lynne McLennan, former Olympian Steve Moneghetti, General Manager – Manufacturing at Maxitran Australia, Glen Walker, CEO of Sovereign Hill Jeremy Johnson, Editor of The Courier Angela Carey, General Manager of 3BA John Fitzgibbon and ABC regional radio presenter, Prue Bentley.

The issues around water included:

- Apparent inconsistencies in drought declaration and how that affected regional farmers;
- The need for a water distribution grid across the state and nation, just as there is for gas and electricity;
- Eventual inclusion in the potable supply of water recycled from sewage.

By a show of hands it appeared clear that most in the room were prepared to accept a mix of recycled water in the potable supply for domestic purposes.

The need for and the potential impact of an increase in police numbers dominated discussion on community safety issues. It was asserted that a recent weekend with a low number of arrests for late night violence in the city coincided with increased police presence.

It was also argued that there remained an ongoing need to, where possible, address issues at the early stages within and through the family in the hope of reducing the potential for disruptive behaviour from young people as they grew older.

Emphasis was given, however, to the point that Ballarat remained a generally safe environment in which to live and there needed to be an effort to overcome the perception that it was not.

Both residential and business growth in Ballarat’s West was discussed, with the argument put that the attraction of job creating businesses to the Ballarat Airport precinct needed to complement and ideally lead the expected population growth.

At this point the issue of a car racing track for the airport precinct and the potential economic benefits it could bring were strongly argued.

There was also discussion of the need to consolidate the manufacturing excellence of Ballarat and to link it with the research activities and opportunities through the University of Ballarat.

Discussion ranged around road and rail freight connections. The point was made that, while the focus was on growth in Ballarat's West, there remained much opportunity for infill residential development in the established East of the city.

Leadership was seen as vital in ensuring these and other issues facing the region were managed properly into the future. There was discussion of the importance of sport in developing leadership among the young.

There was clear consensus that much was being done to promote and develop leadership and that this should be encouraged.

Cultural values and lifestyle were raised as integral to Ballarat and region's future, with tourism based upon the heritage and history of the city seen as vital.

At the same time there was encouragement for developments such as the solar cities project at Ballarat Airport and wind farms as strong signs that the city and region has an eye to the future. While there could be negative views of such developments, the audience was encouraged to recognise and represent the positives.

Every opportunity for developing the recreational values of the city should be seized, with extension of bike riding opportunities and the filling of Lake Wendouree high among them.

Points raised by the panel participants in conclusion were:

- There's a place for major events developments within the city;
- Promotion of the great assets of the region;
- Developing leadership in youth through sport;
- Manufacturing excellence linked to the university;
- Use networks and be good ambassadors for Ballarat;
- The no tolerance concept should be considered regarding late night behaviour;
- Take a risk and show leadership.