

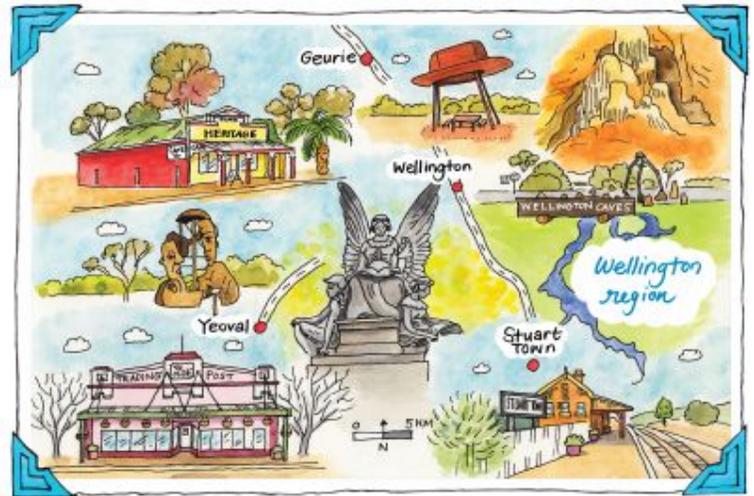
Association Spotlight: Wellington Teachers Association

August 27, 2019

Number of members: 121
President: Phil Hughes
Secretary: Kathy Coon

Our meetings: Our association enjoys strong Federation membership and Wellington TA meetings are generally well attended, with most regular attendees being high-school staff. Association meetings, held once a term at Wellington Soldiers Memorial Club, provide an excellent opportunity to socialise with colleagues, debrief and problem-solve issues, as well as gain insight into Federation's current campaigns and training opportunities. We only have four scheduled meetings per year when our Organiser attends, with any other meetings called by the association's executive as necessary.

Our community: Wellington is Wiradjuri country and has a rich Aboriginal history. It is also known for the Wellington Caves and Burrendong Dam. The current township was established in 1846 and was the second town founded west of the Blue Mountains once the explorers Gregory Blaxland, William Lawson and William Wentworth found a path across the Great Dividing Range. John Oxley was the first European to document the Wellington area while exploring the Lachlan River, and he named the valley after the Duke of Wellington.



With a population of 4700, Wellington is a typical rural town with limited industry and employment opportunities, but enjoys essential services. Government services provide vital employment, however the surrounding agricultural industry is struggling with the worst drought on record. Many people seek employment in our closest regional city, Dubbo, and commute daily, or choose to reside in the larger regional centre and commute to Wellington for work.

There are two public schools in town, Wellington Public School and Wellington High School, in addition to two private schools. The smaller surrounding villages of Geurie, Yeoval, Stuart Town and Mumbil have K-6 feeder schools to the local high school. Wellington Public has an enrolment of approximately 520 pupils and Wellington High has approximately 300 students. Both have a high Indigenous student population of around 50 per cent.

Our local council amalgamated with Dubbo City Council in 2016, making Wellington part of the new Dubbo Regional Council in the state electorate of Dubbo. The Nationals' Dugald Saunders narrowly won the seat this year following the retirement of Troy Grant. The federal member for the seat of Orange is Andrew Gee, another Nationals representative.

Our challenges: Being a small rural town, all schools within the Wellington Teachers Association are directly affected by the prosperity of the surrounding agricultural industry as well as the high proportion of low socioeconomic status families in the area. Our local schools lose enrolments when parents choose private or public schools in Dubbo, taking advantage of the free daily bus transport, or choose to send high school students to boarding schools.

Like many rural towns, Wellington occasionally finds it difficult to attract faculty-specific staff, but many newcomers fall in love with the picturesque town's peaceful, laidback lifestyle and make it their permanent residence — once they make the brave decision to cross the sandstone curtain! Teachers often stay for their entire career, contributing greatly to wonderful community organisations such as the Wellington Amateur Theatrical Society, Wellington Arts, Rotary, the Wellington Show Society and the Eisteddfod committee.

An added advantage of life in Wellington is that the town has most essential services, is welcoming, housing is affordable and there is as much or as little to do socially as one chooses.

Our teachers: Both the local schools enjoy a mix of young and experienced teachers, but like many primary schools, the ratio of male and female teachers is heavily tilted towards female staff. Some of the younger teachers at the high school are from the Central Coast area and Hunter region.

Our focus: Presently, Wellington TA is focused on informing the community about the need for greater public school funding, encouraging all teachers to be a member of Federation and ensuring staff are informed of their rights and responsibilities.

Members are encouraged to attend any of the training days run by Federation, especially those held in nearby regional centres because other training opportunities can involve great distances, time and expense.

A recent highlight: The Wellington TA held a combined public education/Federation Centenary Dinner in November last year, where we were honoured to host Deputy President Joan Lemaire, who spent some of her early teaching career in Parkes.