

## Association spotlight: Bega Teachers Association

May 26, 2020

**Number of members:** 145

**President:** Jennifer Mace

**Secretary:** Justina Baumann

**Our meetings** The meetings are enjoyable events, during which we are able to socialise and network with colleagues in our association. We currently meet at Club Bega for designated association meetings, at 4pm on Thursdays after Council, although we are looking for a more accessible venue. Regular association meetings are positive and productive, with an enthusiastic core group. When meetings are for stop work action or over concerns about employment conditions, they are well attended.

We've tried various venues to suit the large geographical region our association covers, although this has been difficult. We have also tried to encourage members through social activities afterwards, with food provided. At our meetings, we start out with more general conversations about activism and Federation involvement in our workplaces, and then branch out to include association business.

**Our community** Bega, and much of the surrounding region, was badly affected by the recent bushfires and other events. Over the past three years, we've had three bushfires, a flood, a drought and now COVID-19. Bega is the major centre in the Bega Valley Shire, with a population of 4500, and features mainly a low socio-economic status (SES) community. We aim to strengthen the community through our teachers — not just from an educational perspective but a social one, particularly after the impact of the recent fires and the COVID-19 situation.



The Bega Valley is traditionally an agricultural area with a focus on dairy, and is home to the famous Bega Cheese brand. The region is also transitioning from forestry and fishery to tourism.

Bega High School, with 700 students, is the only public high school in the association. It has eight partner schools in total, including Tathra (15km east), Cobargo (40km north), Wolumla (20km south) and Bemboka (40km west).

The association's catchment falls within the federal electorate of Eden-Monaro, which is now set for a July by-election after the April resignation of Labor's Mike Kelly. NSW Transport Minister Andrew Constance holds the state seat of Bega.

**Our challenges** Our main challenge is attracting teachers to the region. Due to a relatively highly priced rental and property market, considering the nature of the rural location, there is a lack of teacher housing.

Along with the low socio-economic status, there are ingrained cultural and social attitudes in the region that can make it difficult to engage the community regarding the benefits of public education. The distance between schools and access to transport and infrastructure, can make it difficult for students to attain equal

opportunities in the region.

**Our focus** [At the time of writing] our focus is on transitioning back to face-to-face teaching after COVID-19, while at the same time increasing membership with Federation.

**Our achievements** We have a working group made up of association executive and participating members, and have lobbied at polling booths at recent elections. We have acknowledged our outstanding members with life memberships of the association and Federation.

**Our executive** As well as President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer, we also have a Woman's Contact, Aboriginal Contact, LGBTQI Contact, Early Career Contact and a Special Education Contact.