

## Association spotlight: Batemans Bay Teachers' Association

August 04, 2020

**Number of members:** 157

**President:** Frank Scognamiglio

**Secretary:** Bec Howard

**Our meetings** Association meetings are conducted on the grounds of the Catalina Country Club, Catalina (Batemans Bay), after school hours, commencing around 3.30pm on the Tuesday after Council. Meetings do follow Federations protocols; however, there is plenty of scope for flexibility, input from members and open discussion. The venue in which our meetings are conducted has recently undergone extensive renovations. It is now a very comfortable and welcoming environment in which to conduct our meetings. There is also the option of meeting on one of two outdoor observation decks, overlooking the golf course scattered with local birdlife and kangaroos. Representatives from all schools usually attend regularly, and there are occasional visits from casual or visiting teaching staff.

Each year, our association tries to engage in activities to reinvigorate and uplift our membership. With this in mind, we have invited Presidential Officers each year to visit our part of the world and share a little wisdom, while enjoying the beautiful South Coast and the company of some interesting members. Our association also conducts retention and recruitment events as well as keeping regular and updated communications within the school community.

**Our community** The immediate area of Batemans Bay, which is part of the Eurobodalla Shire with an overall population estimated in excess of 37,000, only has approximately 1500 residents. The Batemans Bay Teachers Association includes teachers from Batemans Bay High School (established 1988), and three feeder primary schools; Batemans Bay Public, Sunshine Bay Public and Mogo Public.

Students attending these schools may come from anywhere between South Durras to Broulee, which covers a beautiful coastal strip of around 40km. Many of the permanent residential families in this area are, according to the 2016 ABS Census and the Department of Education, are categorised as low socio-economic status school communities.

Apart from the COVID-19 concerns affecting all of Australia, our area suffered terrible losses to our environment, family homes, local business and community members during the December/January bushfires. Christmas did not come to the Bay in 2019 — a large number of communities and residents isolated, without power, telecommunications and family support.

They were truly frightening and traumatic times for those affected, hopefully never to be experienced again. However, during these times, our teaching staff and school communities continued to provide a haven for



students where possible, and a continuation of learning and wellbeing support for all.

**Our challenges** As an area with high needs underpinning the community and students, all schools maintain a high focus on the development and improvement, not only in literacy and numeracy but also the connection with students and the community. Of course, this is all done within budget, yet much of the planning, support and even resourcing in some cases is undertaken by teachers directly, in their own time. It can also be challenging to effectively incorporate differentiated learning and initiatives to support our students within infrastructure that is already at capacity in most schools, and in need of updating and/or repair.

Many of our public school colleagues, especially those in rural and remote areas, experience similar challenges, but for us, such issues coupled with the recent bushfires and now COVID-19 are having a significant impact on our ability to maintain quality teaching and learning experiences for all students.

As always, our teaching staff continue to work tirelessly to ensure students access to quality teaching and learning. However, such experiences are not sustainable unless the above issues are addressed, underpinned by community and teaching staff consultation.

**Our teachers** Our high school has the largest teaching staff population, with a 1:3 ratio of male to female staff. At least a third of all staff are approaching the twilight of their respective careers, and a sprinkling of “new blood” has been introduced into the mix in recent times. This, combined with a number of changes to executive staff, has facilitated a renewed vigour in our day-to-day activities. Our primary schools have a mix of seasoned staff and a number of recent staff coming to our schools, fresh from completing their studies. However, being a relatively remote community, we do not attract as many newer or graduate teachers as our metropolitan cousins.

**Our events** The BBTA has participated in several events within the Eurobodalla shire, including participation in letter drops, direct contacts with local and federal representatives, a trip to Canberra to meet with politicians, supporting our neighbouring association with their market stall and distribution of Fair Funding Now! and Federation material during elections, and conducting Federation meetings as required during negotiations with the State Government. Currently, we are considering options for possible events post COVID-19 restrictions. A favourite in the past — barefoot bowls — is out as our closest bowling club was burnt to the ground during the fires. However, as social distancing rules change, we look forward to any safe gathering of our members to personally connect and share stories, as all good teachers do.

**Our executive** Our Association comprises a Secretary, Treasurer, Counsellor and Presidents. All positions are supported by our membership base through individual school-based Federation Representatives, Women’s Contact and Workplace Committee members present in all our local schools.

What is the best thing your association has done in the past five years?

Of all the activities our association has been, and will continue to be, involved in; arguably the most important has been the continual support for our local community and the trade union movement. The education of our membership and society in general of the benefits derived from a unionised labour force to help preserve job entitlements and greater job security, which ultimately facilitates improved economic security for the individual, their families and the communities in which we live.