

NEWS EDEN-MONARO DECIDES

Tumut locals disheartened by level of government

Alex Crowe

MARY Schwind raised her children on a dairy farm in Bodalla before moving back to Tumut where she was born, to take over Blowwriting Holiday Park 10 years ago.

The park on the outskirts of town has a handful of permanent, about 30 regulars who mostly come to fish and room for about 100 others - usually a mix of holidaymakers and labourers.

Her sons manage the Kingston Hotel and The Chic Pub. Her phone calls to them often drop out because reception is so sketchy.

"If you want to talk to Telstra you stand out on the road and Optus only gets about half the park," she said.

She said there was no National Broadband Network and they still used dial-up internet to run their business.

Ms Schwind said she liked the look of Labor candidate Kristy McBain but all the candidates "were much of a machine" as far as she was concerned.

"Liberal - they just seem to give their money to the city and forget about us out here," she said.

"It's taken us nearly 30 years to get the new Tumut Hospital started - they were going to do that not long after I left school."

Tim Martin was even less hopeful that new representation would bring change to the region.

The Tumut River Brewing Co owner kept operations going during coronavirus shutdowns out of fear that shutting the doors would mean never reopening.

"No part of this has been easy and no part of this has been well-funded so we've always been skirting that fine line of being viable or not. When COVID came we just found other ways," he said.

"The idea was to do something big enough that it would stand on its own to attract the crowds and prop up the smaller ones if they have a go," he said.

There has been a lot of verbal support but when it comes to actual help, no one does. Maybe that's all governments."

Sandra Pfitzner spends her time between Orange and Tumut, where her mum has an aged-care facility.

On Thursday she had just cast her vote before she sat down for a beer with her friend Sue Smart. "I voted Labor," she said. "Environmental issues are the biggest thing for me."

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Sarah Johnston, of Murrumbidgee, with co-owner of Trades and Co Sophie Peer, and Evol McLeod, of Yass. Pictures: Janelle Toderas

'Get on and do it': Yass residents left frustrated by candidates' inaction

Alex Crowe

AT "THE town centre" on Thursday, Sarah Johnston and Evol McLeod were writing letters to Eden-Monaro by-election candidates prior to visiting the ballot box next weekend.

From inside the busy shop - which houses a cafe, grocery and office space - the retirees requested the 14 hopefuls provide clarity on their refugee policies.

A former teacher from Murrumbidgee, Ms Johnston said so far the campaign had been all water, roads and hospitals. Acknowledging all three were important, she said they weren't the only important issues. The candidates' refugee responses would sway her vote.

Ms McLeod will vote La-

bor. Having moved to Yass after a career in community cultural development in Canberra, she said she hoped Kristy McBain would fight for a bipartisan approach to refugee settlement in Australia, emulating Malcolm Fraser's policies after Vietnam.

"We'd also like our candidate to be a strong voice for blocking Peter Dutton's bill to have mobile phones banned in detention centres," Ms Johnston added.

Ms McLeod had the highest number of Rural Australians for Refugees associations in the country, with seven separate groups working collectively across the electorate. "It's having a big impact but it's quiet, so we just keep it up, we keep going with it," Ms McLeod said.

I am sick of announcements about our hospital and I am sick of announcements about the Barton Highway. We know they need fixing.

Sophie Peer

Co-owner at the cafe, Sophie Peer, moved away from her refugee policy career in Sydney to "impact change on a micro level" in the Yass Valley.

Ms McLeod said she was voting for the Greens, while acknowledging she wasn't particularly hopeful of them getting up.

"It's a message. It's a message about refugee policy, it's a message about climate

change, it's a message about fast trains for the region, the economy of this region and leaving behind refugees in the JobSeeker and JobKeeper payments," she said.

Ms McLeod said the election campaign had felt disrespectful of voters in the Yass region.

"I am sick of announcements about our hospital and I am sick of announcements about the Barton

Highway, we know they need fixing," she said.

"We agree they're important issues. Just for god's sake get on and do it. I don't care who or with what funds - the funds are there - we need healthcare so stop having photo ops and telling us you're going to do it," she said.

Over a second round of coffees and while grandpa popped in to nurse baby Sophie, Pene Butt and Georgina Scroope discussed why the environment was the biggest factor influencing their vote.

"Climate change and climate action is very important. It's easy to move onto the next issue and forget about the fires but in terms of our day-to-day - it's not going away," Ms Scroope said.

She said going along par-



Yass residents (above) Sophie Scroope, baby Georgina Scroope and Pene Butt and (below) Tina and David Fraigneux have different concerns about the Eden-Monaro by-election.



ty lines, the Coalition was generally fractured in its approach to environmental policy, which would likely sway her vote away from Liberal candidate Fiona Korvojs.

"I suppose the same issues exist within the Labor party, but Kristy McBain has never shied away from saying it's an issue and we need to grapple with it. I suppose the experience of the fires in her community is a constant reminder," she said.

Ms Butt works in education in Canberra. She said her husband's family was an old Yass family and the pair had lived in Yass for a long time.

She said like her daughter she was sick of the fighting between political parties, particularly when it came to climate change.

Ms Butt thought the best representative would be a young candidate who brought fresh ideas to the region.

"I think we actually need to take a bipartisan approach to this now and just sort it out because it's going on and

on and on and on and that's costing the country dearly," she said.

Down the street long-time Liberal voters Tina and David Fraigneux were catching up with "unionist" Kenn Debnam.

A retired antique upholsterer and a retired curtain-maker, the Fraigneuxes immigrated from England to Bowring almost 40 years ago.

Was Mr Fraigneux concerned about the candidates' stance on climate change?

"No," he said. He was absolute on that, too.

Mr Debnam said it was important to him.

"I've lived and worked all over Australia, mate," he said.

"I've never seen anything quite like this last summer."

All three agreed, though, that the Yass Hospital needed a low-risk maternity ward, which they believed Kristy McBain was more likely to deliver.

"My granddaughter lives another 35 kilometers away and when she was having a baby she went all the way to

Canberra and was home again. Then she go all the way back, way for young kids - never had a baby," Ms Fraigneux said.

Last year NSW pledged \$4.7 million to the ward if elected. NSW Liberal govt did not match that after it won, state officials are investigating for a facility, an ongoing campaign Yass women.

"We're Liberals time I'm voting for Liberal. I've never a socialist in my life nothing about this candidate - I think take us for granted here," Mr Fraigneux said.

"As for the Barton way, we immigrated from Kent in 1972 were told then the way would become lanes - parts of it a goat's track. I understand how have a major tie to a national capital - it's embarrassing