

local knowledge  
economy, environment, community &  
genuine, transparent engagement

BRIAN WILSON – MACEDON RANGS WEST WARD



29<sup>th</sup> September 2020

Macedon Ranges Residents Association  
Attn Ms. Christine Pruneau  
Via email

Dear Ms Pruneau,

Thank you for your email and background questions. I agree that it is a unique and unusual time of change for Council with retiring elected representatives and the opportunity to appoint a new leader of the operational staff.

Ahead are also many unique challenges for the Ranges, especially with the financial impacts of the Covid pandemic changing so many conventional aspects of Council operations and planning. Additionally, the increasing actions of government in overriding local processes calls for more innovative and strategic thinking.

I have prepared responses to your questions which provide a clear indication of my position on matters of environment, land use planning and governance.

I would also add an important observation in that recent years have seen many Council decisions made with a degree of covert control or 'CEO/Executive filtering'. Budget development and internal cost structures are just some of many examples. While not a 'ground zero' approach, we do need to re-examine and review many of these items that have ongoing or future relevance.

In addition to your questions, I have a range of other positions informed by talking to local people which I've included on my info site: [ourmacedonranges.online](http://ourmacedonranges.online)

Like with everything, the best solutions always come from informed discussion and respectful debate. These are the cornerstone of my values and I believe there is so much that can be achieved and improved.

Have a read and of course feel to call anytime.  
Kind Regards

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brian Wilson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line underneath the name.

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## BRIAN WILSON: MRRA RESPONSES

### BACKGROUND

*In which town/area do you live in the Macedon Ranges Shire?*

*How long have you lived in the Shire?*

*What is your occupation?*



My name is Brian Wilson and I have lived in the Macedon Ranges for over 15 years after moving from Melbourne to enjoy the rural-urban lifestyle.

I live north of Kyneton surrounded by bushland, farming properties and adjoining, small-scale new housing developments.

My background encompasses media, aviation and executive management delivering major infrastructure as well as extensive consulting. My current role is a broadcast journalist at *NINE Media*, writing, editing and presenting news for 3AW, which is relayed to more than 100 stations across Australia.

I am also the co-owner of *Ellenis Day Spas* which includes the Ranges' premier spa in Kyneton. The Spa attracts large number of tourists and visitors to the Shire and has a policy of promoting a 'whole-of-region' perspective.

My broad ranging skills means that I understand the need for the highest level of probity, governance, financial integrity, planning and innovation. Being able to critically examine issues and situations and think strategically is a core strength.

Working locally and in Melbourne also means I regularly traverse the entire Shire. This broader perspective is important as the challenges ahead will demand that all elected representatives have an intimate knowledge of local issues both within and outside of their Wards.

You cannot beat local knowledge and insight which is why the best solutions usually come when people talk and work together.

## COMMITTMENT

*Do you think you have the time to be an effective full-time councillor?*

*Have you participated in any local community-related groups and/or volunteer activities?*



My work schedule is adaptable and will enable me to allocate the time required to properly fulfill the expectations of the ratepayers.

As publicly stated, I firmly believe that a Councillor is not qualified to, (and should not) vote on major issues unless they have visited the location. In the case of major developments and decisions, Councillors MUST have spent time speaking with local people, businesses and communities.

Additionally, I believe Councillors should spend at least half a day every month with their 'sleeves rolled up' working alongside and under Council's front-line staff. The concept of Councillors only being briefed via the CEO or an Executive Officer is a tragically flawed model and often omits the in-depth knowledge, insight and ideas of front-line staff. *(I have worked within Councils where there is positive engagement between officers and councillors and the results demonstrate the benefits)*

Locally, I am active supporter of numerous community groups, emergency services and organisations. Our businesses also provide direct and financial support. Our policy is that we do not seek acknowledgement or exposure. We keep our involvement and support 'low-key' - especially in our work with the disadvantaged and homeless.

I have also served on Regional Tourism Advisory Panels and was awarded a Paul Harris Fellowship for my community commitment.

## AFFILIATIONS

*Are you a member of or affiliated with a political party or other special interest/lobby group, and if so, which?*

*Are you or your campaign benefitting from endorsement, financial assistance, in-kind support or donations from a political party or special interest/lobby group?*



I have no affiliations with any political party – **it is my view that there is no place for bias or party politics in local government.**

My belief is that if any Councillors “vote along party lines” then they have compromised the primary purpose of their role.

I have not received or sought any financial assistance, donations or support from political or special lobby groups.

## VISION

*What do you hope to bring to council, for example, experience / qualifications / skills?  
Have you participated in any council-related activities? If so, can you describe what type?*



As well as my role as a broadcast journalist, I have management experience in infrastructure, aviation, maritime, environmental management, tourism, urban planning, marketing, media and communications.

I am experienced in managing multi-million-dollar budgets, bringing the highest level of probity, governance and transparent accountability that is not influenced by political parties.

The next five years will bring challenges like never before, demanding innovation, prudent management and a hard-working Council that makes every ratepayers' dollar work twice as hard to buffer the Ranges from the tough economic times ahead.

My contribution would be to ensure:

- Genuine engagement and listening to communities
- Driving a local economy that creates jobs and opportunities
- Creating a positive staff culture that is service driven
- Smarter planning and environmental management
- Resilient emergency response plans and resources
- Commitment to ensuring better value for ratepayers' money
- Strong, accountable governance with a focus on outcomes
- Forward planning that includes every village and town

I have participated in many Council matters including stakeholder workshops, consultations and engagement with state government.

I also have been a strong advocate for the ‘Ranges share of tourism funding and support working on numerous projects across the Shire.

## KNOWLEDGE

What knowledge / experience do you have of council-related issues? For example:

- a) Which if any parts of the Macedon Ranges Council Plan do you think should change?
- b) Are you familiar with the Local Government Act, and what does the term "Winky Pop" mean to you?
- c) Have you had any experience with the Macedon Ranges planning scheme and planning applications?
- d) What does the Distinctive Areas and Landscapes legislation, and "protection", mean to you?
- e) What does "community representation" mean to you?
- f) What do you think are the main responsibilities Council has on environmental issues?
- g) Can you name any Council matters currently in progress (up to 3) that the new council will decide?



I have extensive experience and knowledge of local government processes, including within the local Shire.

- The Council Plan is an agglomeration of numerous sub-plans and in places, a pragmatic mix of well-intended policy that requires further development. I note several of the sub-plans have not been updated for several years and are based on now outdated assumptions (including parts of the February 2020 revision) The post-covid environment requires all aspects of the Plan to be re-examined.
- I am familiar with the Local Government Act and understand its interface with other legislative instruments.

*'Winky pop' is of course the local government version of media sub judice. In practice, every on-air news bulletin I produce present requires the ability to consider a balanced proposition or circumstance. My accreditation requires this to be demonstrated and is subject to external independent examination and review. (If a Councillor turns up to vote without considering all aspects and bases their vote wholly on their own predetermined bias, then they should not be a Councillor!)*

- I have experience with many Planning Schemes including the Macedon Ranges Planning Scheme. My experience is as an applicant, adjoining landholder, community member and tourism sector advocate.

Planning Schemes by their nature, tend to be a 'one size fits all' compromise that in an area like the 'Ranges struggles to articulate the unique attributes and requirements of local areas. The greatest failing of our local scheme is that it often sees development proposals in isolation or within a narrow context.

The Macedon Ranges is growing and without a more articulate and proactive Planning Scheme and related processes, there is no doubt appellant jurisdictions and even the state will 'force-feed' what can be, less than ideal outcomes.

Council must improve the planning processes to provide more transparency for communities, better certainty for sustainably appropriate, viable investments and an expedited 'up-front' process that enables local communities to work with applications to create the best 'design-led' solutions.

Setting the agenda by defining 'what we want and expect' upfront is preferable to endless rounds of expensive debate about 'what we don't like' in an individual application. *One way of defining what is desired is this example of a [Design Guide](#) produced by another council which although relating to a large city, has been successful in influencing the quality of applications. The guide sits alongside the Planning Scheme and is an overt expression of the intent of the scheme.*

In my experience, these sorts of processes create better outcomes and avoids ratepayers and applicants incurring huge costs in VCAT and the courts (*where the decisions are often taken away from the locals*). The smarter, design-led approach also means better quality applications, an end to staged applications (*where the subdivision application is separated from the ultimate use and built form*) and means that investors and communities are not tied up for months dealing with issues that can (and should) be resolved at the front end.

The Macedon Ranges must be regarded as a location that welcomes high-quality, environmentally sympathetic, investments that benefit the Region. But it also must be a place where poor quality design or inappropriate developments will be 'knocked-out' early, well before ratepayers' and applicants' time and money are wasted considering them.

Planning processes must also tap into and consider the enormous knowledge and insight of nearby residents, businesses and communities.

This means that Council Planning Officers must be empowered to get out from behind the desk and into the field where they can work with locals to achieve the best outcomes that do not compromise the distinctive and unique environment.

The key is that planning must be an integrated process.

- Community representation is about genuine engagement.

You cannot beat local knowledge and insight which is why the best solutions usually come when people talk and work together. Even when views differ, **respectful debate provides understanding** and often is the foundation of great outcomes.

Councillors are the community's advocates. They need to be in touch, accessible and understand the operations of the Council.

The days of the CEO 'filtering' everything is no longer appropriate. The challenges that face the Ranges in future years means that the way the Council operates must change. Bureaucratic pondering or party politics have no place.

My position is that the engagement spectrum must clear and honest and not a 'box ticking' exercise. For example:

- Council meetings should move around to all of our towns and villages
  - Every meeting should open with an 'open mic' session for community members
  - Councillors should spend some time every month 'hands-on' helping in various departments to better understand the region's needs
  - Major developments must have a mandatory site visit by a Councillor prior to voting
  - **Transparency must drive everything**
  - We must look ahead, admit mistakes, fix the problems and work to achieve what is best for Ranges' communities
  - The inappropriate, top-heavy 'island-like' management of recent years should be replaced with a dynamic, proactive approach that links the 'brains trust' of staff, elected representatives and community members in formal and informal settings
- The Macedon Ranges is an 'enviro wonderland' and Council's role is to take the lead in ensuring our natural assets are protected, celebrated, shared and sustainably showcased.


Protecting the environment is not about restricting access or locking people out. Rather, it requires intelligent, detailed plans that measure and monitor flora, fauna, water and potential risks.

It also requires positive education and intelligent management. Where people, businesses (*or even semi-government utilities*) do the wrong thing, Council must lead the charge to impose strong penalties and importantly, ensure actions are taken to prevent future issues.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are many Council matters on the agenda – some, like Gisborne’s broad-acre development and the heritage ‘clean up’ overlays have advanced without proper integrated planning, proactive consultation and appropriate control frameworks. <i>(the amount of decisions based only on ‘desktop assessments’ is scary!)</i></li> </ul> <p>My view is that there is also a list of critical matters that are currently NOT before Council.</p> <p>For instance, the Emergency Management Plan is out of date and does not deal with the changes imposed by Covid-19 for egress routes, evacuation centres and safe places. The re-activation of tourism and individual town/village plans are also urgent priorities.</p> <p>I am of the view that the incoming Councillors will need to create a priority list of matters and, in some cases, conduct a review of some of the major items.</p> <p>Staff culture and the appointment of a suitable leader (CEO) are also critical matters.</p>
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<b>ALLIANCES</b>
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<p><i>Are you publishing a how to vote card anywhere? If so, what are your preferences?</i></p>
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	<p>At the time of writing, I am still in the process of contacting my fellow candidates.</p> <p>I have not produced a how to vote card – each candidate must be accountable for their own positions.</p> <p>The voting process places emphasis on the choices of local people (<i>as opposed to ‘above the line’ party preferential allocations</i>) – the differing positions, and in some cases lack of positions, by other candidates will mean different things depending on a voter’s location and relevance of the issues canvassed.</p> <p>My desire is to see a Council of dynamic, proactive people that are not influenced by party politics or ‘what we’ve always done’ - but are committed to being the voice for their local communities.</p>
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