

Issue # 14  
SUMMER 2025

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# THE COBURG MEDDLER

HOTTEST SUMMER EDITION



**THINGS COULD BE BETTER**

*Art by JO*

In a push to keep the bastards honest, Sue Bolton has launched her campaign to be elected as the federal MP in the seat of Wills. A Kaffiyeh-clad Bolton can be spotted most weekends around the electorate at community stalls. At one such stall, we tried to question Bolton about the existence of gold deposits under Coburg (something we swear she had previously let slip), but she quickly pivoted to her campaign. Bolton is running on a Socialist Alliance ticket promoting pro-Palestine and public housing

policies.

Wills is a Traditionally safe Labor seat (it has only once been held by a non-Labor MP when it was won by independent Phil Cleary in 1992), but the Greens have been battling hard since a notable surge of support in 2016, when Peter Khalil first took office. Although Khalil has so far managed to keep a Greens victory at bay, recent changes to electoral boundaries across Victoria increase the prospect of a Greens-held Wills.

Wills is amalgamating some 20,000 electors from Adam

Bandt's seat of Melbourne (while also losing voters to Maribyrnong).

Despite (or because of) his new role as special envoy for social cohesion, there is a question of whether support for Khalil has dwindled due to his Labor-aligned position on Palestine and inaction on climate change.

While Khalil could be seen to be simply toeing the party line, there is space for him to have taken a more progressive stance.

STORY CONTINUED PAGE 3

**CONTRIBUTIONS**

We encourage submissions from readers and residents. Whether it is art, creative writing, exposes, opinion pieces, tips or any other form of input.

This newspaper was written and developed on Wurundjeri Land. Sovereignty has not been ceded. If possible, people should contribute to the Pay the Rent campaign.

If you have something you'd like to share, please get in touch.

<https://paytherent.net.au/>



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**THE TOWN CRIER**



a CFMEU solidarity meeting, an anti-weapons forum and an anti-fracking event. The latter saw a panel of inter-state guests hosted by a coalition of local climate groups. It was also forebodingly held on a sweltering November day (the smoking ceremony had to be cancelled). May the hall continue to open its large doors to more such events throughout 2025.

story. Apparently the motorbike-enthusiast told the new owner that Flirting Shadows referred to the experience of riding a motorbike in the sun, casting shadows on the road which the rider has a sense of flirting with. The Meddler apologises for not drilling down on the truth of the matter. This mystery remains unsolved.

**CHIHUAHUA PARK MEET UP A SUCCESS**

Photo by John Englart

**EX-SPOOK SPRUKES TO YOUTHS**

In the lead up to Christmas, Peter Khalil explained to a bunch of confused primary school students at Merri-bek Primary about the importance of education, as part of his 2025 election campaign. Onlookers could not recall the details, except that he helped hand out zooper doopers. In late January 2025, Khalil tried the same approach but this time at the Pentridge Child Care Centre, his campaign team hoping to avoid tricky questions about Gaza or the environment.

**CITIZENSHIP CEREMONIES**

In 2022, Merri-bek council passed a motion to discontinue the tradition of holding citizenship ceremonies on January 26 - one of the first councils to do so- shortly after which the federal government allowed the change. Peter Dutton now claims a coalition government will revoke this change and force all councils to hold citizenship ceremonies on Invasion Day.

**MERRI-BEK LOWERS FLAG**

January's latest ceasefire deal could ease the pace of Israel's genocide in Palestine and is a step in the right direction. However, in the immediate aftermath of the plan being announced, Israel's military activity picked up in the West Bank.

The day after the three-phase ceasefire deal was struck, Merri-bek Council lowered the Palestine flag. This is despite a motion passed by the Council on 23 March 2024, to 'continue the current flag arrangements for flying the Palestinian flag at Coburg Civic Centre until a permanent ceasefire is declared'.

**COBURG TOWN HALL BECOMES HOSPITABLE**

Coburg town hall has been more hospitable than usual of late, hosting several well-attended events including

**FLIRTING SHADOWS UPDATE**

Two years ago the Meddler interrogated the owner of Flirting Shadows about the meaning of the business' name. At the time, he told us it was about the designs you see in a coffee. Earlier this month, the Meddler asked the new owner of Flirting Shadows what the name meant, and he informed us that the previous owner told him another

Around this time last year, Darebin council attempted to lower the Palestine flag on the basis of wanting to acknowledge Invasion Day and Pride. Due to a push from the general public mobilised by the Darebin4Palestine group, the motion failed. Critically people

from the gay and first nations communities spoke out on Darebin pitting their struggle against Palestine's, and it seems the same will happen now in Merri-bek.

Coupling this development with state and federal government pleas to cease the weekly Sunday rallies, it is clear that continuing to speak on Palestine will become harder, not easier.

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Consider the case of Tony Burke, whose Sydney electorate also has a large muslim population from the SWANA region, and who has been consistent in his attempts to push Labor's agenda to recognise Palestine for many years, showing that there is some room for manoeuvre - at least for a senior MP. Khalil should not be let off the hook for simply sticking with his party's position. Particularly in light of calls from the community for him to represent a more principled stance. When he refused to speak out against Labor's reluctance to condemn Israel, protesters uncovered a number of his pro-Israel comments and positions. For example, it came to light that Khalil voted against a motion at an ALP national conference to recognise Palestine in 2018 (Burke voted in favour), and he has referred to being a 'friend to the state of Israel'. The question is whether he will be penalised for his friendships this election.

As for his campaign platform, Khalil says he's focusing on 'real action' on the housing crisis, the cost of living pressures, climate change and renewable energy. You could forgive a Wills voter for rolling their eyes at his promise of 'real action' on climate change, following his poor track record.

In 2023, after months of pressure, locals finally succeeded in getting Khalil to form the Wills Climate and Environment Advisory group (WCEAG). WCEAG's remit was to gather information and create climate priorities to inform Khalil's climate decisions. In mid-2024, the group resigned en masse, in frustration of Khalil's silence on Labor's continued approval of a series of coal mines (an ongoing hobby of theirs, with three more approved while voters were in a Christmas ham frenzy). There are another forty currently awaiting approval. The WCEAG stated in a public letter to Khalil, that while Labor came into office with a strong mandate on climate action to limit temperature increase to 1.5 celsius, its actual policies were "inadequate" in terms of emissions targets, "misguided" in its over-reliance on offsets, carbon capture and storage, and in "need

of review". WCEAG pointed out the contradiction between the government's stated reduction targets and its continued subsidisation of new fossil fuel projects, citing a list of misdemeanours including new coal and gas projects, a dubious carbon credit system, expansion of offshore gas projects and attempts to exclude offshore emissions from scrutiny, to name a few. The group felt that their hard work had been ignored, stating:

*"Initially we thought that working with you could bring a better outcome. We engaged in the process of priority setting (as requested by you) with a high level of commitment. At the meetings that followed we provided official reports, media statements and arguments supporting the group's priorities. We had hoped that by arming you with this information you would be able to add value to the government's policy setting process and say your piece in caucus to get some sense. Instead over the past year, again and again, we have been dismayed and disappointed."*

The group concluded that "the current climate crisis demands that we turn our energies to actions that give us greater hope".

For the 2019 and 2022 elections, Khalil's control over Wills was stable, but with a shift in the electoral boundary, and with Samantha Ratnam as a high-profile state MP throwing her hat in the ring, Khalil may have a significant run for his money. Ratnam provides a well-timed and enticing option for those spurned by Khalil's inaction. A local union delegate said Ratnam's speech at a Teachers4Palestine rally was 'really good', and before the union had even gotten involved.

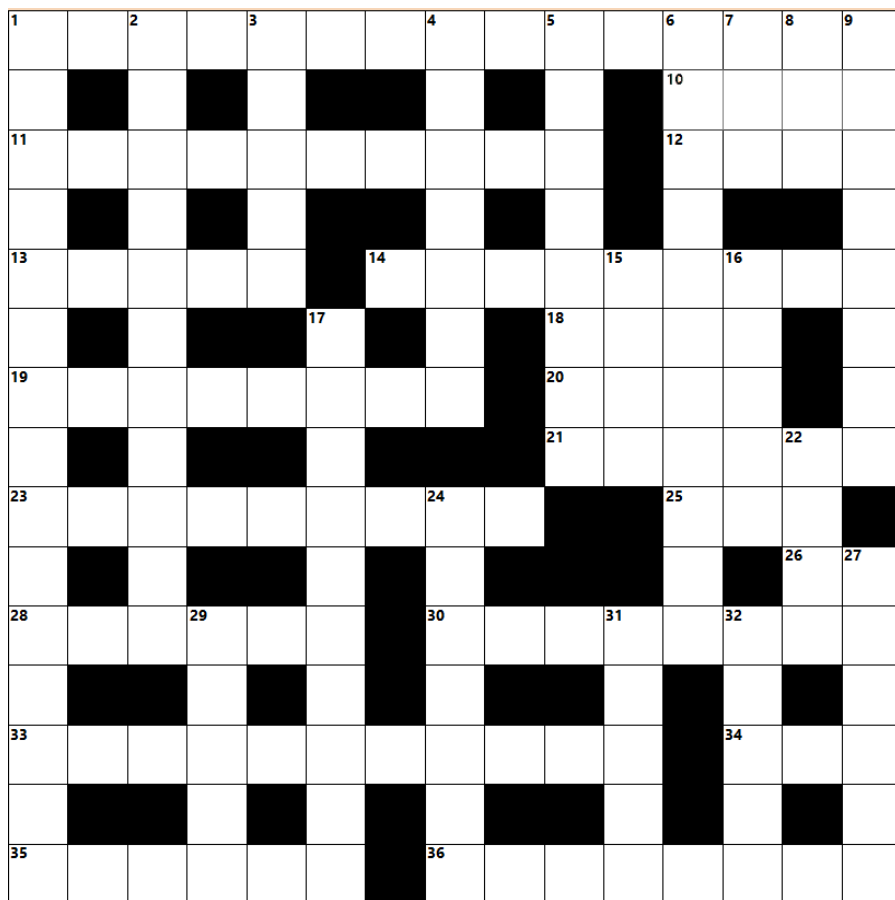
In the last Wills election, Khalil came out on top with a firm, but not comfortable, 58.6 per cent of the vote. Things could be better in Wills. The question is whether Ratnam and Bolton present an answer the locals are ready for.

*By BB & SAS*

*NB: Our local photographer was unable to supply us with a photo of Khalil because he (Khalil) is keeping a low profile, but our local artist worked overtime to ensure our readership wouldn't miss out.*

# GENERAL KNOWLEDGE CROSSWORD

by *cappo dog*



## DOWN

- 1 The first five nation-states to develop nuclear capability are collectively known as the permanent members for which governing body? (8,6)
- 2 Which First Lady of the United States exacerbated social problems associated with drug use by characterising it as an individual problem rather than a public health concern with her “Just Say No” campaign in the 1980s? (5,6)
- 3 Which Sean Baker-directed film about a 23-year old sex worker who marries a Russian heir took out the 2024 Palm d’Or at Cannes? (5)
- 4 Which language of the Americas gives us words such as chili, avocado, chocolate, chia and guacamole? (7)
- 5 Which ancient and medieval weapon was reported by US Border Patrol to have been used to smuggle cannabis from Mexico into Arizona in 2017? (8)
- 6 Which Coburg athlete won a silver medal in the men’s 200m at Mexico City’s 1968 Olympics, and received a posthumous apology from the Australian Parliament for the poor treatment he received on his return to Australia after wearing a badge in solidarity with two US who raised their fists in a black power salute in one of the 20th century’s most iconic sporting photographs? (5,6)
- 7 Which acronym refers to the moment when a company issues its stock for the first time on a public exchange? (3)
- 8 Which animal, a national food of the Gunditjmarra people, gives its name to a 2024 album by Being Dead, and does not have sex until the last year of its life? (3)
- 9 Which term referring to people seen as reactionary and rural first appeared in print in the US in 1830 to describe the Ulster-Scots population of Fayetteville, North Carolina? (8)
- 15 Often combined in curries with other vegetables such as saag, bindhi and gobi, what is the Hindu word for potato? (4)
- 16 What is the Boon Wurrung language word for the area now known in English as Port Phillip Bay?
- 17 The 1950 song by Mel Blanc, “I Taut I Taw a Puddy Tat”, is from the perspective of which cartoon character? (6,4)
- 22 Cogito, \_\_\_ sum. René Descartes, Discourse on the Method, 1637. (4)
- 24 What nickname, given to a young beginner Scuba diver, is shared with Tad Reeves, cousin of Toadfish in Neighbours? (7)
- 27 Which bird, which carries a dubious colloquial connotation, is named for the indigenous language of Madagascar and can be hair-crested, shining, fork-tailed, and (when Australian) spangled? (6)
- 29 Which group, which aims to accelerate economic, social, and cultural development in its region, was founded by the Bangkok declaration and is headquartered in Jakarta? (5)
- 31 “He was full of pep. Must’ve had his grande latte \_\_\_\_.” Jack, Fight Club (Chuck Palahniuk). (5)
- 32 Which word meaning ‘all’, is the first in the title of Little Richard’s biggest hit, a song which features the lyric ‘Wop bop a loo bop a lop bom bom’? (5)

## ACROSS

- 1 Which Californian landmark described by Jack to Rose in Titanic (1997), has featured in Not Another Teen Movie, Rocky III, Forrest Gump, and is destroyed in both 2012 and Pacific Rim Uprising? (5,6,4)
- 10 Which is the largest and heaviest of the weapons in fencing? (4)
- 11 Which rule, derived from the range of 17th century coastal artillery, asserted that a state had territorial sovereignty into the sea within three miles of land? (6,4)
- 12 Which verb is used as the past participle in the passive voice construction to indicate the recipient of an action, following a causative verb in the past perfect tense? (4)
- 13 Which name, translated literally as ‘Queen’, links a Mexican Radiant from the Valorant video games series with a 2nd generation USA international footballer who also plays for Borussia Dortmund? (5)
- 14 Possibly best known for Climax (2018), which Argentine film director received Palm d’Or nominations at Cannes for Enter the Void (2009) and the controversial Irréversible (2002)? (6,3)
- 18 Which is the longer of the two bones in the forearm? (4)
- 19 What is thrown in boxing to indicate surrender? (3,5)
- 20 Which word, internet-speak for lore that is leaked from an upcoming release, is also Spanish for ‘praise’, and Cornish for the moon? (4)
- 21 Which strait, also known as Zenadh Kes, is named for a Spanish navigator who sailed through in 1606, and was in part the subject of a high profile court case that challenged the myth

- of Terra Nullius upon its conclusion in 1992? (6)
- 23 Sean Connery was interacting with what item when he first delivered his iconic catchphrase “Bond... James Bond.”? (9)
- 25 Which vaccine, first licenced in 1971, has (according to the WHO) contributed more than any other to reducing child mortality in the 20th century, having resulted in an annual reduction of 2.5m deaths? (3)
- 26 Which (abbreviated) netball position works most closely with the goal keeper to intercept passes and protect the goal circle? (1,1)
- 28 Which branch of the U.S. Armed Forces is known for the motto “Non sibi sed patriae,” meaning “Not for self but for country”? (1,1,4)
- 30 In the Harry Potter series, what dark creature feeds on human happiness and guards the wizard prison Azkaban? (8)
- 33 Which country is home to the largest church in the world, is the largest producer of cocoa beans, and has qualified for three FIFA Men’s World Cups via its team, Les Éléphants? (4,7)
- 34 Jesus, on his pilgrimage to Glastonbury, is said to have been walking to Cornwall to acquire which galvanising metal for his carpentry business? (3)
- 35 Which annual meteor shower peaking in November, is named for the constellation in which it appears, and shares a name with a Soviet leader whose term in office was second in length only to Stalin? (6)
- 36 Which pilgrimage, \_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ de Santiago, given here in Spanish, is translated into English as the Way of St James? (2,6)

ANSWERS ON PAGE 12



**WHAT'S UP? - by Vlack**

February opens with a magnificent lineup in the evening twilight: Saturn, almost-New Moon, and shining Venus. This tableau of two planets and Moon, slightly reshuffled, will repeat on February 2. Look to the western sky just after sunset (7:30 pm).

On the nights of February 6 & 7, the waxing Moon will pass near the planet Jupiter, which is in the northern sky outshining all stars, including nearby bright star Aldebaran in the V-shaped Hyades constellation.

The alpha-Centaurid meteor shower can be seen between January 28 and February 21, falling from the southern sky near the Pointers. These meteors are renowned for their blue or yellow fireballs, with trains that can last for minutes. The peak rate, about 6 falls per hour, will occur on February 8. However, the Moon, approaching fullness at this time, may be a nuisance for observers.

On February 9, the Moon can be seen to pass near yet another planet in the northern night sky- Mars, which will be in Gemini, and close to the Twin stars, Castor and Pollux.

Venus has been drawing closer to the Earth, and, being an inner planet, showing us phases and more of its dark side, but still getting steadily brighter- until February 15, after which it will fade and become lost to sight passing in front of the Sun.

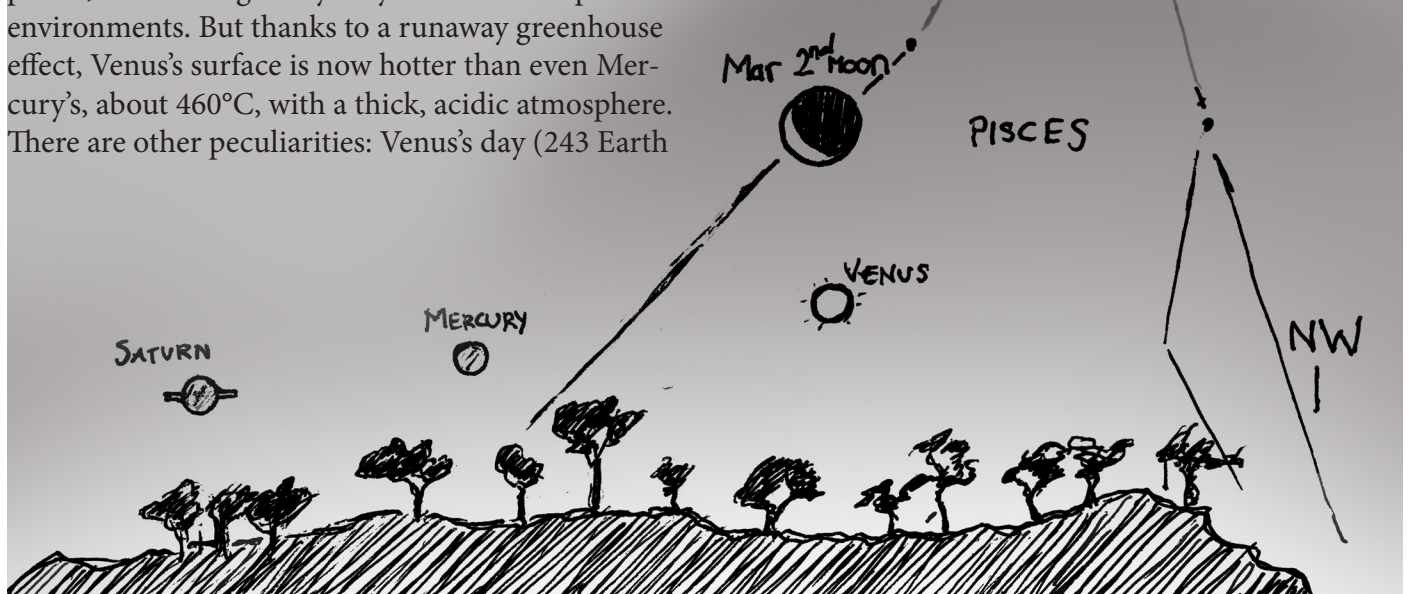
Venus has often been thought of as Earth's sister planet, and eons ago they may have had comparable environments. But thanks to a runaway greenhouse effect, Venus's surface is now hotter than even Mercury's, about 460°C, with a thick, acidic atmosphere. There are other peculiarities: Venus's day (243 Earth

days) is longer than its year (224 days); and, spinning counter to most of the other solar planets, Venus has the Sun rising in the west. Despite these eccentricities, humans persist in sending rockets to Venus; as this goes to press, Rocket Lab is launching the Venus Life Finder mission to search for complex organic chemistry, and perhaps even life in some form, within the high-reaching clouds of Venus (which are much cooler than the surface).

March starts with an array spectacular but difficult to view: Saturn, Mercury next to the merest sliver of New Moon, and Venus, all low on the western horizon just after sunset on the 1st – but only visible between about 7:15 and 7:40 pm, when they set. If you miss this, it's worth looking the next two or three evenings at the same time - though the line will be broken.

March 14 will be eventful: the gamma-Normid meteor shower will be at its peak at this time, with up to six bright yellow, white or orange meteors falling per hour from the Norma constellation in the southern night sky. However these will be rather outshone, and outdone, by the Full Moon, which will rise (at 6:40 pm) in a partially eclipsed state in the twilight, and reach maximum umbral effect just above the horizon - after which it will slowly lapse into normal brightness.

On March 20 the Earth will be at its first equinox for 2025.



## MERRI-BEL COMMUNITY SHED

Merri-bek Community Shed, or 'MerriCS', has steadily grown into a local institution. Despite this, in mid-2024, Merri-bek Council disclosed that the group only had a short-term user agreement that was set to expire at the end of last year. It appears that the fate of MerriCS hinges on whether the Council accepts a proposal from the Bachar Houli Foundation, a not-for-profit run by ex-AFL player Houli, to build a \$20 million multi-purpose sporting facility for culturally diverse youths to feel safe meeting and playing sport together. Former Councillor James Conlan attempted to include in Council's July 2024 motion an amendment to consider the inclusion of the various community groups that have utilised the space. This motion was lost.

What seems apparent is that if the Bachar Foundation can secure that amount of money from state or federal donations, which is their plan, they could probably afford to develop the facility anywhere else around the parameters of the Coburg Oval. Whereas MerriCS and the Coburg Commons Garden depend on existing structures to operate.

The president of the MerriCS, Dave, explained that the group started as a Zoom call in the midst of COVID-19. "I was the last person to step backwards when elections were happening for the main roles". The group is very clearly not a men's shed. When we arrived at the old Bowls club, we came across what appeared to be a true

cross-section of the local community. "There's nothing wrong with Mensheds, but this area needs far more than just 50 year old men whittling away at some wood".

Merri-bek council owns the building, and the group negotiated a use agreement for some time before opening their doors to the public in late 2023. According to Dave, the group's ultimate goal is to have a permanent facility set up for the work members want to do, as the current space doesn't meet all their needs. Despite the building's limitations, the group has members interested in woodworking, metalwork, pyrography, ceramics, glazier work and textiles to name a few. Recently, the group introduced a blacksmithing forge to their impressive collection of professional-grade equipment. Dave says that the group's leadership, half of which is constituted by tradespeople, take their tools and safety very seriously. "We need to ensure safety. There have already been quite a few second hand tools that we just had to get rid of. If people want to donate stuff, we say 'great, that's awesome' but we need to do a thorough round of testing to make sure it's safe. We test in three ways: an electrical safety test, a mechanical safety test and an accuracy safety test".

STORY CONTINUED PAGE 8

BOOKMARK SERIES #3 - Extend the Sydney Rd Street Party to Coburg



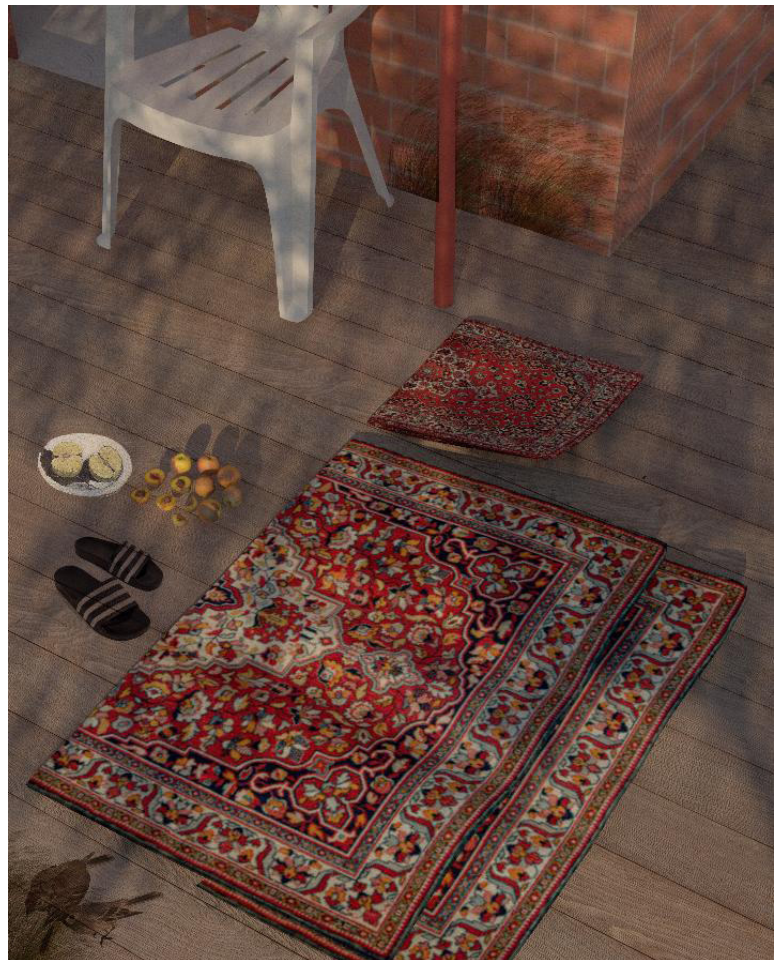
## ARTIST OF THE MONTH



The thesis aims to offer an *expository yet ephemeral analysis* of space-making that encompasses practices of dwelling or *doing the landscape versus showing or exhibiting with the landscape* within, explaining how practices concern *performance, embodiment, and the everyday*. Our bodies hold memories, and rituals are a way of connecting ourselves to something familiar. Inspired by the narrative of rituals the motif of the Afghan Rug as a way of orienting bodies as well as the Australia rhetoric of meeting under a shaded cloth. Works like Jon Olsen's landscape paintings to Max Dupain's Sunbaker encapsulate the traditional 'Australian' experience however Anna Zahlas's staged photography highlights *re imagined contemporary Australia*.

My thesis question is *How does a space for the 'Australian women' take place?*

Hosna Eqbal  
@eqbalatelier



STORY CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

The group has been forging connections with other groups in the area too. For example, the Commons Garden which had to move away from its spot opposite Coburg Library due to Uniting Church undergoing a renovation, has made its home on one side of the green. The group also sends some members to participate in things like the Sussex Neighbourhood House Repair Cafe.

For those who may feel trepidation about stepping into a community shed with experienced tradespeople, Dave explained “people with very limited skills come in all the

time”. Dave shared the story of a young man who walked in one day. “He said ‘I used to do woodworking with my dad and with my grandfather. I miss that now, and I just want to do that again’. Now he’s made two beautiful pieces. If someone comes in with limited skills but wants to make something, you just let them get on with it and wait for them to call out to ask for help with things, like ‘how the hell do you make this joint?’”

Part of the endeavour of the Shed is to teach people how to actually share tools. The Shed’s success and growth depends upon the quality of their tools. The Shed teaches people about what it takes to be responsible for the proper treatment

and upkeep of the tools, not just by cleaning them, but by understanding their limits.

MerriCS is running a craft market on 16 February 2025 from 11-3pm, selling plants and locally made goods.

At the time of writing, becoming a member with MerriCS requires a yearly subscription fee ranging from \$40 for concession holders, \$70 for general membership or \$100 for ‘patron’ membership.

**Merri-bek Community Shed**  
19 Harding St Coburg  
Open Sunday 9-1pm, Tuesday 5-9pm and Thursday 9-1pm

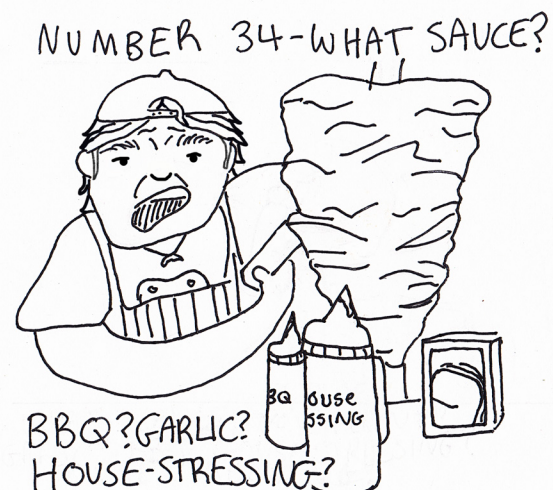
## HOUSES FOR MOUSES

Merri-bek can make you a mean kebab, but it can’t give you solutions to homelessness, a lack of public housing and high rental prices.

Any renter in Coburg can tell you that rent prices are out of control. And if you don’t want to talk to them about it – because let’s face it, who does – you can receive the same information from recent reports released by Homes Victoria. Median rent in Merri-bek is currently between \$450-\$660 per week (depending on rooms). Renting is unusually high in Wills compared to the national and state average, and ABS data from the 2021 Census determines that, in the electorate of Wills, 27.7 per cent of people are in housing stress. According to a 2021 council report, “the only people in Merri-bek guaranteed an affordable rent price are those in public or community housing (social housing), but this is only 3 per cent of Merri-bek homes of which very few are in Coburg”.

While it’s true that Merri-bek can’t be held responsible for the State Government’s hostility to public housing, they can’t pretend there’s nothing to be done. As the Allen Government is

currently busy gutting public housing in favour of a smaller number of privately owned ‘social housing’, local council should be investigating their own solutions. Social housing sounds good, but is often only semi-regulated with easily-met requirements such as short-term affordable rentals. It is also harder to get evicted from public housing, whereas social housing providers can follow the same rules as private landlords. There are plenty of other initiatives Merri-bek could





trial pursuant to their ‘affordable housing action plan 2022-26’. At the moment, their plan is mainly focused on facilitating social housing.

In the June 2024 Council Meeting, former councillor James Conlan sparked some controversy by requesting a Council investigation into differential rates for property investors who have more than one residential property in Merri-bek. In response to the media storm, some landlords commented that they would simply raise the rent for their tenants, causing renters to express concern about increases in their already sky high rents. However, Conlan’s background to the report suggested that where the State Government made a similar decision during COVID-19, there was no evidence that the increased rates were passed on to renters.

Another approach is focusing on vacant homes. Housing unaffordability set against a backdrop of multiple unused properties across Merri-bek and broader Melbourne defies economic sense.

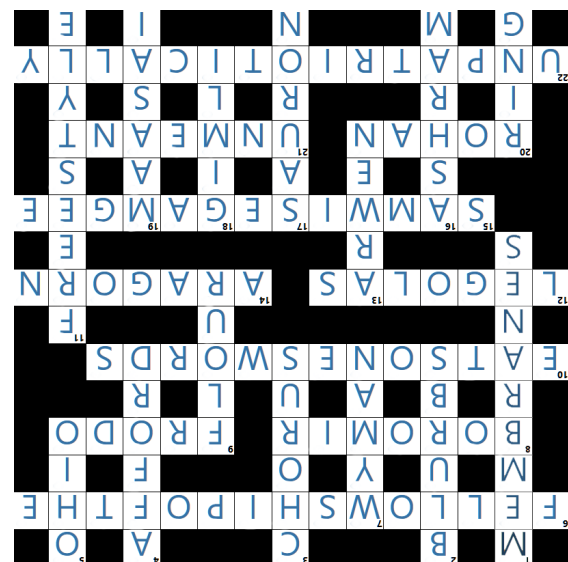
In late 2023, the Victorian Greens managed to pass a bill that raises taxes on vacant homes, which took effect on 1 January 2025. The legislation will add a 1 per cent tax liability in the first year, 2 per cent the next, and with a cap of 3 per cent (unless there is a genuine attempt to sell). It is too early to tell if this will make a meaningful impact on housing affordability and availability. The additional tax liability seems quite low.

According to 2024 figures released by Prosper Australia, 1.5 per cent of homes in Melbourne are vacant, and 3.7 per cent are barely used (Brunswick East purportedly wins the contest with over 12 per cent of houses vacant). Housing advocate and senate candidate for Victorian Socialists, Jordan Van den Lamb (known on social media as Purple Pingers), has additional data sourced by individuals submitting suspected vacant properties. Mr Pingers reported to the Meddler that he has had 28 homes submitted for Coburg/Coburg North and 110 homes submitted for the Merri-bek area - (excluding some on the outskirts of Merri -bek). This data has been used to match people to empty houses, as well as to draw attention to the absurdity of vacant properties during a housing shortage.

Mr Pingers also argues there are numerous effective measures available at a local council level that could increase housing viability. These include: introducing a definition of “affordable” which is proportionate to renters’ incomes (instead of tied to the increasingly unaffordable “market rate”); inclusionary zoning whereby a proportion of new developments are required to be public housing instead of “affordable housing” as defined by Homes Victoria; the purchase of empty properties by council to convert into (council-run) public housing, and removing the extra votes for landlords in local council elections, to name just a few.

**Pingers’ tips to identify vacant housing:**

- Garden is overgrown
- Check the gas meter (the gas is off when the red or yellow handle is at a right-angle with the gas pipe).
- Look through windows to check for furniture
- Check the mailbox for signs of use
- Knock on the door a few times
- Check for open doors and windows - common in vacant properties
- Use common sense



CRYPTIC CROSSWORD ANSWERS

## DUKKANA AT THE OLD HASSOONS

The Meddler visited the new pop-up on a rainy Sunday and found Fatima, one of the sisters who run it, cleaning. She welcomed us in, saying that the pop-up would formally be open next week and run until February. “We chose the end of February more so as a pitch to our father, who owned and ran the shop”. The previous Sheikhtaba Grocery/Hassoons Cafe closed four years earlier and the space has been vacant since.

The plan, according to Fatima, was to run the old store as a place for community. The transience of the space was important to keep the fabric of the neighbourhood, but the future of Dukkana is ultimately being played by ear. “Our father is proud of us and the work we’ve put into this” said Fatima, when commenting on the experience of helping out in their father’s business as younger girls, and now taking over the space as an artistic, community-oriented project.

During the weeks that they are open, the sisters are running a schedule of art and community events. In the first week, there was an admin/co-working day, a ‘hang out’ day, and a decorative fruit platter workshop. The following week, there was embroidery and photography.

Dukkana has a large lounge space for people to talk, read and play cards, and an exhibition

space displaying various artists. The sisters have used the old bain-marie to showcase Safa’s (one of the sisters) embroidery business and designs. In the back, there’s a ‘sister’s closet’ section, referencing the phenomenon of the shared sibling wardrobe.

Charming still is the artwork paying homage to the Sheikhtaba grocery, with artwork of fruit and veggies populating old fruit stalls.

### Dukkana pop up

99 Harding Street, Coburg 3058



## THERE’S ALWAYS A PLAN IN COBURG

Merri-bek Council has been deciding what should be done with Coburg central (AKA Carpark City) for a long time, but plans have often gone awry. Coburg is the largest suburb in the municipality in both land area and population. Relative to the three Brunswicks, Coburg has a lot of space and a steadily growing population, making it attractive to developers.

In the late 1980s, the Council put out a tender for major development in the Coburg shopping precinct, which led to a few nicer benches, plants and shop fronts in the 1990s.

In 2002, the Merri-bek council created the ‘Central Coburg 2020 Structure Plan’. Community consultation was opened up, and people were encouraged to make suggestions.

In 2008, Equiset, a subsidiary of the much maligned Grollo construction dynasty, was announced as the primary developer for the suburb. Equiset quoted \$1 billion for plans including 1500 new dwellings (20 per cent of the dwellings were set to be ‘affordable housing’, (which Daniel Grollo said he could

‘live with’). In 2011, the council terminated its agreement with Equiset, citing finances as the reason.

At some point during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Coburg 2020 plan was abandoned - presumably due to the difficulty of getting investors during the apocalypse.

In April 2024, Merri-bek council announced their latest plans to meddle with Coburg in their ‘revitalisation Coburg’ plan. This plan targets council owned land along Sydney Rd, with a focus on the massive carparks

they own near the Coburg Library. However, the council is hamstrung by their (somewhat outdated) contractual requirements to provide a car parking quota to the adjacent businesses, hampering their development aspirations.

Recently, Merri-bek also released their 'Coburg North Sports Masterplan', seeking to rejuvenate what they have named Coburg's 'Sports Hub'. This area includes Harold Stevens Athletics Track, Jackson Reserve, Coburg Basketball Stadium, Coburg Olympic Swimming Pool, Ray Kibby Table Tennis Centre and the surrounding area.

Merri-bek has assured the community that they want input for both plans, and that they will take the proposals from the public very seriously. How much Merri-bek plans on implementing the thoughts of locals in their final plan remains to be seen. This is a Council that, in June 2024, proudly announced that 0.25 per cent of their 4-year budget would be spent on projects suggested by the community. We hope that the community's input for such major projects will account for more than that.

Of particular concern is whether Merri-bek plans to sell public land, which it has been known to enjoy doing for quick cash injections, despite community and some councillor objections (hopefully the Merri Health Hub is worth it,

Merri-bek).

As yet, nothing has been confirmed for the area other than a report on the outcome of initial community engagement.

In mid-2023, the Meddler decided to pre-empt the council's next development plan by recommending a giant, multi-use onion. Currently the space is occupied by Schoolhouse Studios, bringing together local artists. In this vein, the Coburg Onion was intended to be a theatre and arts space in Coburg, to continue fostering local art projects.

This suggestion did not generate much support. Unlike the local council, we are responsive to community sentiment (silence), and have changed our proposal to a Shaun Tan sculpture garden in response to a fairly intense resident who felt that Coburg was held back by its lack of a Parc Güell.

*By Edwina Snagge*



### WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

I first came across Extinction Rebellion (XR) in the city in 2019. I was trying to mind my own business when I saw a spectacle drawing a crowd near Flinders St station. A group of activists had blocked the Princes St bridge and were calling for action on climate change. I hadn't been involved in street protest or any activism before this time but it struck me instantly that I ought to be on their side. This, I thought, was the kind of seriousness demanded by the situation.

So I jumped in and found a hopeful, friendly and growing grassroots movement under way. I hadn't been involved long before the pandemic came and took the wind out of the movement's sails. When I crawled out of the rock I had been under for most of 2020 & 2021 things looked much different. The 3 local chapters of Extinction Rebellion in Melbourne's north (one of which had filled every room of East Coburg Neighbourhood House during weekly meetings) had amalgamated into a single group, and the remaining participants could all now fit comfortably around a dinner table.

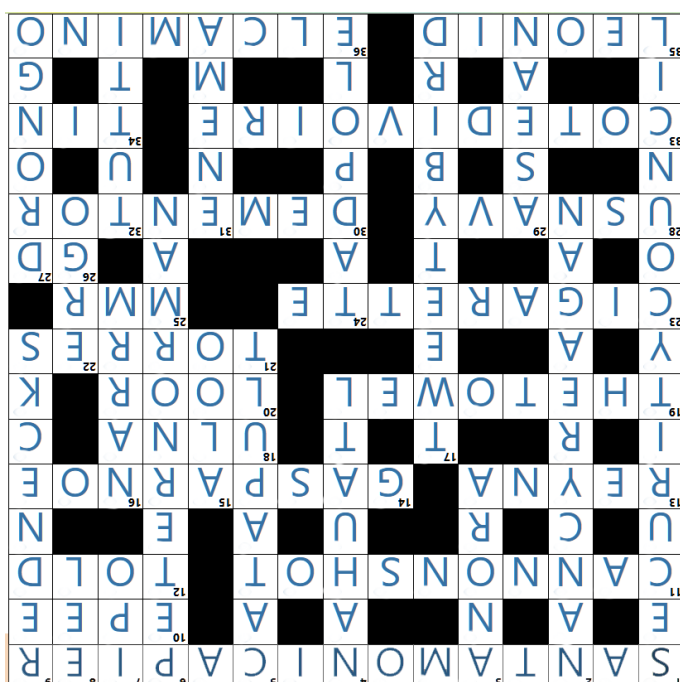
2022 and 2023 saw us pushing on in much the same vein as before. We cooperated with other XR groups around Victoria to plan 'weeks of action' – tightly scheduled periods of daily protests, media stunts, workshops, trainings, talks and performances all culminating in a big march or sit-in at the week's end. There was some really amazing work done and I was constantly impressed by what was being achieved without anyone getting paid and without anyone being in charge. This model of intensive action periods, though, was starting to tire many participants out and new ones weren't often coming in to take the weight off their shoulders.

More recently the strategy has changed. High flying schemes for synchronously dancing flash mobs, specially crafted puppets and costumed characters to take over the city centre in a riotous display of colour and life are out for now. Many organisers have been focused on a different and more straightforward tactic: the Slow March, which has recently been taken to the shopping strips of Brunswick, Preston and Collingwood.

It's a decent loophole. You can march down the street with your signs and so on, but you get from A to B pretty quick and then you have to get off the road and go home without offering any material threat to the status quo. Or you can stand your ground and sit down on the road to make a demand. You'll gain the leverage of stopping economic activity but police usually appear pretty promptly and carry you away.

The slow march cuts it both ways. You block the road and you move - just very, very slowly. "But officer," you say "we ARE moving..." and somehow that's good enough for them to let you do your thing (at least for a while). Slow marching has been pretty effective at causing the kind of disruption that makes people pay attention.

The TV crews like these actions – they'll usually show up and film for the morning news. And they tend to cover it reasonably fairly, though they will always run to interview someone through the window of a truck or ute. The voice of reason in the Australian media: the everyday punter. The comment is usually "Yeah, I get that climate change is bad but I think we can deal with it."



GENERAL CROSSWORD ANSWERS

These people are just being idiots.” Maybe that’s what they really believe and honestly I would like to believe it too. It’s not pleasant to know that the government isn’t doing what is needed to mitigate the escalation of deadly weather events and ecosystem destruction made worse every day by our economic activity. But it’s plainly factual as far as I can tell.

What we do often makes people very upset. People who are affected by road blocks feel targeted or punished by what we’re doing. I’m frequently shouted at and threatened with death. Sometimes I’ve been praised and thanked. It’s not always easy to know how to feel about it. Marching in your own neighbourhood is more complicated emotionally than in the CBD, where you can feel like you’re sticking it to “The Man” instead of getting in the way of people you might see at the grocery store later. I know that no-one who participates in these marches enjoys pissing people off and that everyone is there in good faith. So what is the correct way to protest climate inaction? Lots of things have been tried, and no-one thinks about this question more than the activists. But doing nothing and doing things that haven’t worked aren’t reasonable options so this is what we’re trying, either until it works or

someone has a better idea.

Global warming primarily caused by burning fossil fuels has already exceeded 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels (the safe limit agreed to by countries like Australia when it joined the 2015 Paris Agreement) and may pass 2°C later this decade. Projections from climate scientists indicate that the effect of this global change on our health, livelihoods and environment will be profound and devastating.

From some other dimension where none of this is real, the Labor government has approved or extended 16 fossil fuel projects in their current term. Australia is the world’s third-largest fossil fuel exporter. It’s a fact conveniently ignored because the coal and gas we ship overseas doesn’t count towards our already comparatively high domestic emissions. Will a movement like Extinction Rebellion make a difference? I have no idea, but I hold onto the hope that ordinary people can do something, and these are the people I have found who are genuinely trying.

*By A Small Wet Frog*

## REPORTER IN THE SKY

*Observations from people living in tall apartment buildings in Coburg*

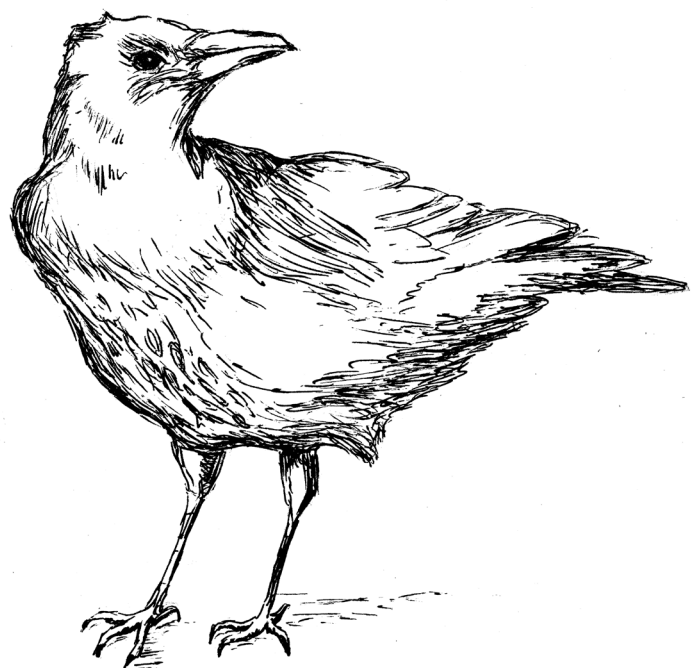
Jail birds of a feather, murder together.

The skies above Coburg have been darkened by an ever growing murder of crows. First noticed at the start of Summer, this flock has grown in size substantially over the last 2 months.

They have settled into a routine of meeting on one particular red roofed apartment in Pentridge from 8.30pm - 9.15pm.

Their conversation is deafening but what they discuss remains a mystery.

By Sky Crier



## GENOCIDE IS SCHOOL BUSINESS

Since November 2023, staff in Victoria's government schools have faced pressure to remain neutral on the issue of Israel's ongoing genocide. This began with the Victorian Department of Education issuing a direction to all principals to share a letter with staff in response to a 'week of action for Palestine' planned by workers. The week of action was organised by the Victorian Teachers and School Staff for Palestine group, and included wearing keffiyehs, hosting Palestine awareness events, posting photos and videos in support. The Department's letter stated that it did not endorse the week of action, and that teachers and staff needed to abide by the Victorian Public Sector Code of Conduct at all times.

Whilst the letter was largely equivocal (e.g. support students, don't upset your colleagues, stick to the curriculum etc.) the Department did make clear that 'school staff should not use their professional position to make political statements or seek to influence the political views of students'.

The Department's Selecting Appropriate Materials policy is meant to ensure students are learning from resources created by 'inappropriate organisations', such as online gaming organisations, tobacco companies and companies involved in the sale or promotion of weapons. However, STEM programs commonly used in schools such 'First Lego League', 'Code Quest' and

'Space Camp' are branded by weapons manufacturers such as Lockheed Martin, Boeing and Northrop Grumman.

The Meddler spoke to two locals who work in government schools, about their experiences navigating this issue over the past year.

One teacher recalled being spoken to by his worried principal after delivering a lesson about persuasive speeches. "We looked at debates around a few current issues... bike lanes, climate change... Often people look at Andrew Bolt" he explained. "The teacher will use a firebrand, with strong language, to analyse. We looked at one speech by Benjamin Netanyahu, who was responding angrily to the International Criminal Court's deliberation over whether to issue a warrant for his arrest."

Referring to the Netanyahu content, the principal told the teacher that the Department did not want him teaching it, before instructing all staff to avoid the issue in their lessons.

"I'm a teacher of humanities, which means I teach controversial issues". Since then, I've still done little bits here and there; nothing major. When the students got to talk about Palestine, they were pretty engaged. No bad things happened."

In brandishing the public sector code of conduct, the Department should probably read the whole thing. A second

teacher told us that the code actually creates an obligation to support and advocate for human rights. For him this means schools being consistent in their teaching of human rights. "Human rights only work if they're universally applied and clearly the decision to not apply them, or to apply them selectively, is a political decision."

His motivation to teach is not only to help students do well in tests, he explained, but to help them to develop as citizens who have a political consciousness - which is a part of the prescribed curriculum. "Giving students an opportunity to develop a political consciousness means thinking about human rights and its selective application. It's not specifically about Palestine. It's also about West Papua or it's about Kurdistan. It's our obligation to teach these things. And that's in accordance with Jewish values as far as I'm concerned."

The teacher, who is Jewish, agreed that teachers shouldn't be going into the classroom and telling students who to vote for, but they should be able to critically analyse with students a speech by a politician and to do that as a pedagogical practice.

"What I would say as well is that the [Department's] directive, if one was to interpret that directive more extremely, is that you are not allowed to do anything political. If that was the case, it would hinder the work we do in the classroom. It becomes absurd."

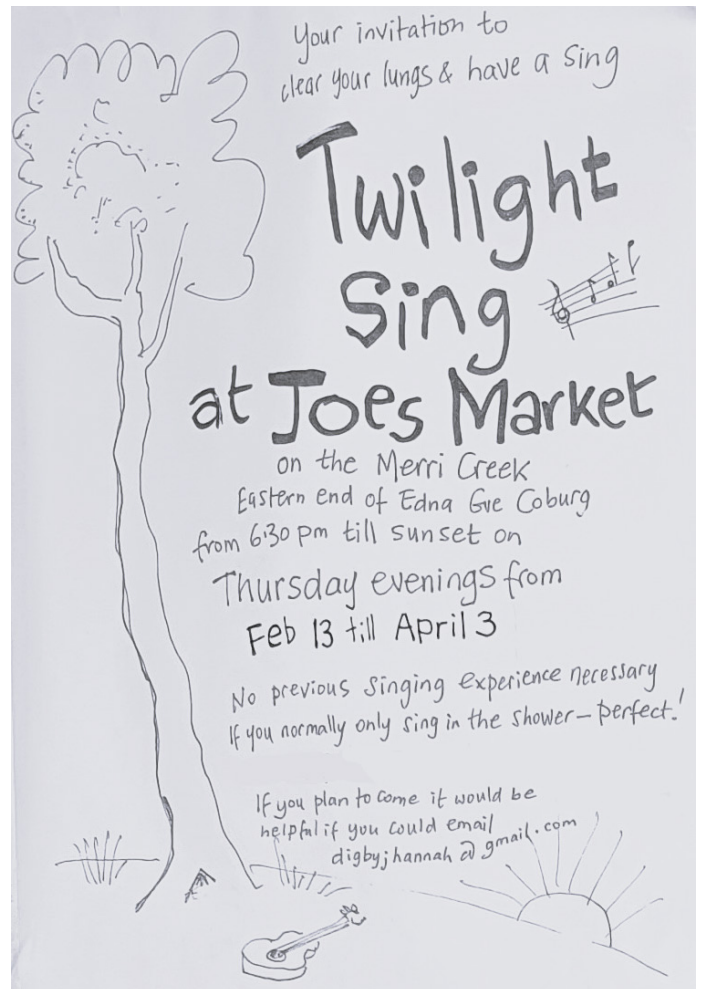
The teacher observed that young people know what is happening in the world; they are curious and have opinions. “The obligation of teachers is to meet students where they are at, whether they have connections to the issues or not.”

“We wear pride badges. We run queer clubs. We celebrate days like IDAHOBIT. So we’re doing political things at schools and anyone who says we’re not is either being disingenuous or spectacularly stupid.”

One of the ways concerned teachers are responding is through the vehicle of the union. At the Australian Education Union’s (AEU) annual branch conference, the highest decision making body of the AEU, teachers have been successful in passing motions. These include ‘Teaching for Peace’, and ‘Palestine is Union Business’. Amongst other things, these motions articulate teachers’ right to teach in alignment with their professional standards, their code of conduct and their conviction as teachers. “In these motions, we’re determining what’s appropriate as professionals, and as people who know our students.”

The AEU now officially promotes a union contingent to march the first Sunday of each month at the weekly protests for Palestine, and has called on the Department to equip teachers with the resources and guidance needed to educate for peace.

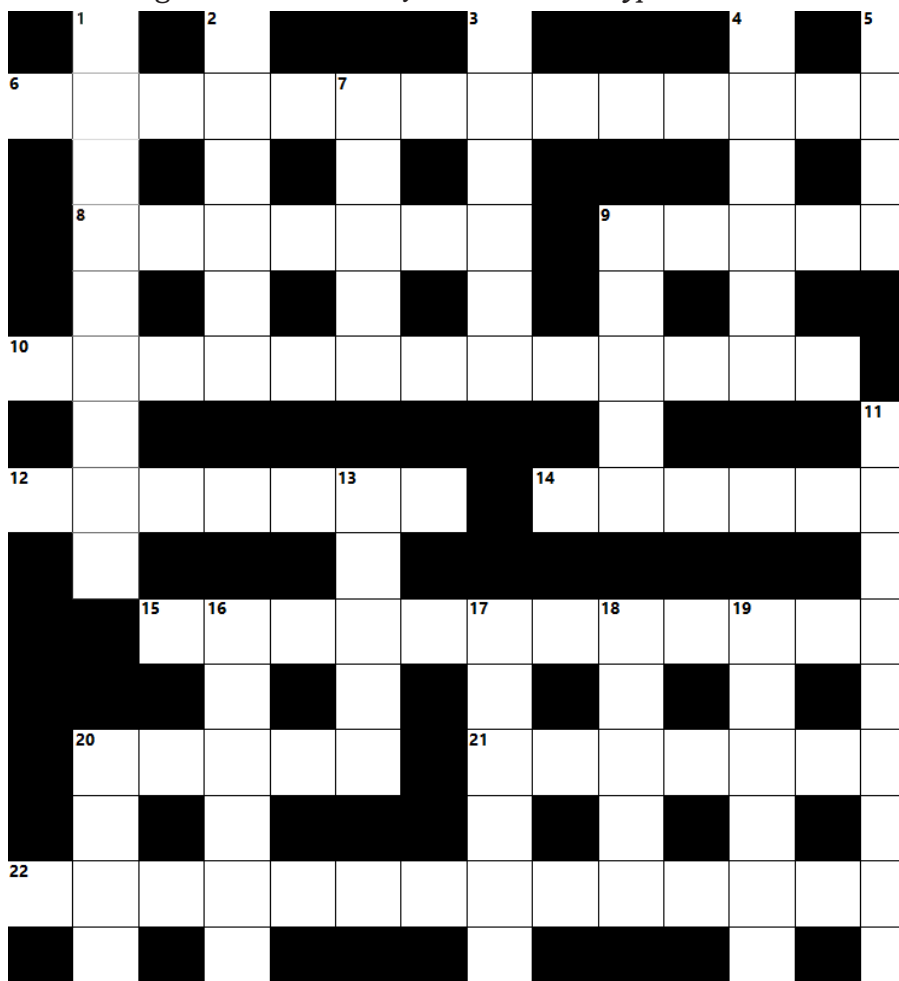
By SAS and BB



# CRYPTIC CROSSWORD

*By Joseph Foley*

*Message @cheesedreams for even more cryptic clues*



**ACROSS**

- 6 & 20D. Chap to dispatch express, frothing over nine companions. (10,2,3,4)
- 8 Broom dusted international relations, tried to take the 20d. (7)
- 9 Dual hairstyles, 20d bearer. (5)
- 10 Reneges on blades, checks notes with each beforehand. (4,4,5)
- 12 6a, 20d bowman Murray lets in tragic goal. (7)
- 14 6a, 20d royalty, hair hang dour and evenly (7)
- 15 Cooke enlightened whale school, gosh, he caught a brace of coneys. (7,6)
- 20 Westfold attendees ran about 5d briefly. (5)
- 21 Accidental toxic ant menu. (7)
- 22 How a usurper stands? United Nations stand thusly; sort of act with internal combustion partner. (15)

**DOWN**

- 1 Gags consuming cereal laminae. (9)

- 2 Residential areas quaintly added large shorts. (6)
- 3 Refrain from macho Russians. (6)
- 4 Air Force let Harrison indulge. (6)
- 5 Casual greeting between nobodies in Midwest State. (4)
- 7 Stone egg replaces chromosome in woman. (5)
- 9 Daily grind for flat out beginners, right? (5)
- 11 Stroke releases powerless Tyler. (9)
- 13 Warne bowled over Evenstar. (5)
- 16 Grey stuff in hermitage. (6)
- 17 One 20d creator began smelting an un-earthed ruby of Numenor. (6)
- 18 6a, 20d axeman over fifty-one upended Russian aircraft. (5)
- 19 Preserved charisma as airborne jumping warriors. (6)
- 20 see 6a.

ANSWERS AT PAGE 9



## THE TWO FACES OF MERRI-MERRI-UTH NYILAM MARRA-NAJ

*“Dangerous Merri lurker” / Ally*

Floating floating Brownian motion  
Flowing where the current takes me  
Bubbles thrashing now I'm airborne  
Oh! I've found some warm environs

Air sugar heat and protein  
Perfect timing best conditions  
Now my job is multiplying  
Chewing through these tender tissues

Help my patient's not responding  
To the only drugs I've got  
Overusing antibiotics  
Have put us in an awful spot

Floating floating Brownian motion  
Flowing where the current takes me  
Oops I'm stuck on to the surface  
Hold on while I push inside

Copy copy copy COPY  
I have made a lot of me  
Can we find more copy homes?  
This one's busted let's spread free

Listening to Mother Nature  
Gives us clues on how to fight  
Microscopic hungry varmints  
Problems of our own devise

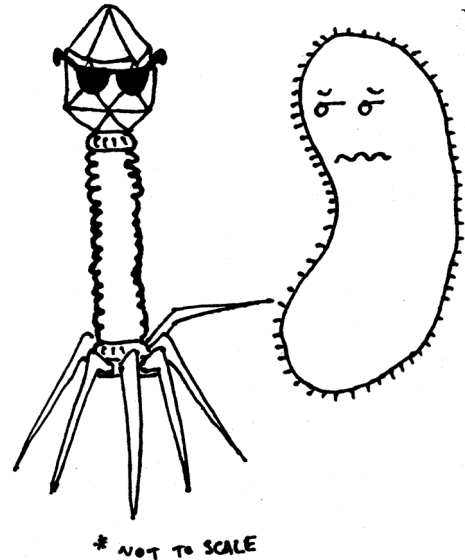
This is inspired by the scientific paper “Genetic variation in individuals from a population of the minimalist bacteriophage Merri-merri-uth nyilam marra-natj driving evolution of the virus” published by Monash University researchers Thung et al. in the journal *mBio* (Volume 15, Issue 12).

In this work the authors study Merri-merri-uth nyilam marra-natj (MMNM) which is a virus that they found in the Merri Creek. It was named by Aunty Gail Smith of the Wurundjeri Woi wurung people, meaning “Dangerous Merri Lurker”. MMNM is a bacteriophage, meaning a virus that instead of infecting humans (like a flu or COVID19) infects bacteria (cells much bigger than viruses but still microscopic compared to humans and cause diseases like pneumonia).

This poem first describes a person being infected by a bacteria and getting pneumonia, and then MMNM infecting a bacteria. Bacteriophages like MMNM float in water, moving randomly (Brownian motion) until they make contact with a bacteria (their host). Then they bury inside the bacteria and use the bacteria's inner machinery to makes copies of themselves until the bacteria breaks open, releasing the MMNM copies to find more bacterial hosts.

Worldwide, bacteria are becoming more resistant to antibiotics (like penicillin) for lots of reasons that include inappropriate use of antibiotics in medical practice, and the use of antibiotics to prevent and treat infections in animals used for food production. In the future, bacteriophages like MMNM might be a new strategy against these antibiotic resistant “superbugs” if researchers can figure out how to safely harness their bacteria-killing powers.

By Dr Emma Boehm



## FLAVOURS OF COBURG

### *Sweet Nectar Inn*

We heard that the new bar on the block, Sweet Nectar Inn, took inspiration from the great American dive bar. We quickly donned flannys and leather jackets and headed down there, preparing ourselves for a fight.

A well-groomed man named Dev greeted us - we thought he'd probably been muscled into minding the business as One-Eyed Hank was busy out back making a Twinkie out of old tires. Not to be fooled, we kept our guard up - "we're not here to cause trouble", anticipating a whack over the head with a pool cue. I asked for the outhouse and was directed to a door. But the door opened to a toilet! Inside! I clutched my guts in confusion and hobbled out,

blinking in the reality of my surroundings.

Sweet Nectar Inn doesn't scream 'dive bar' at all; but it does scream 'we take our beer and wine seriously and will only provide you with choices we actually approve of'. Dev is exceptionally knowledgeable about the drinks on offer, and the team has started hosting the occasional free tasting nights of their wines in order to get people as excited as they are about their range. This little place is a minimum intervention bonanza. Basically, if you don't like pet nat- get out of here, stat; if you do - this place is for you.

Sweet Nectar Inn has a Rustic Shakespearean feel to its

interior, which suits its name. We have since heard that dark woods are back in, which - before you start selling your furniture- you can apparently achieve with coffee or steel wool-infused vinegar - much like making an ancient map.

To sum up, some people want wood-fired vacuum packed pizza, and some people (my mum) want to drink out of a box, so perhaps a broader range of options would draw different punters in. That said, we will be back for their tasty orange wine (before 8:30pm).

#### **Sweet Nectar Inn**

140 Nicholson Street, Coburg

We are not including their hours out of respect





A new mural has landed in Coburg, right opposite a thriving outdoor food truck site along Sydney Rd. Visit Hanna's Kebab truck (312-318 Sydney Rd, Coburg) to appreciate the new mural whilst eating a seriously tasty kebab.

## CANUTE'S BED - A GHOST STORY

*Written by AG (A Ghost)*

I'd been getting sleepy for a while now - months, maybe a year. Without realising I'd racked up a serious cosmic debt, compounding weekly. That's how they get you. Miss one payment and your whole damn gestalt is in default. It'd been like this ever since [REDACTED]

Ergo I was in bed, very sleepy, gaining mass. I was getting so heavy I was waiting for the bed frame to crack but it held strong. "Modelled on the same bed frame Canute the Great used, little lady," the salesman had pitched me, with a tone that was too chipper for the historical gravity of the statement. So the Vikings were conquering the bedroom now. I just nodded and handed over my Diners Club, trying not to inhale. He was wearing an aftershave that had recently been discontinued - some class action about spams. I watched him closely but he seemed self-possessed in physiological terms at

least. Brand loyalty stronger than dystonia.

Anyway I was gaining weight on Canute's bed frame. My mind slow ed right down and started to judder. "Suppose I'm falling asleep then," I noted astutely. But, as with many things in life, when you suppose you make a *supp* out of *o* and *se*. I was in a pickle. My body was asleep but my brain wasn't. I gave nodding off a few more goes but the two-stroke in my head was still sputtering. I thought about a lot of things, like sleeve garters and where good peaches went and what I dreamt about when I was a dog, but I did not think about the picture on the mantel between the flowers and the ceramic Basset Fauve.

I lay like this for a while, thinking but not-thinking (about the [REDACTED] on the M). I opened my eyes. The light was a dark, metallic blue. I knew it was eternal somehow. It was a light with no momentum,

empty of transition. When I was a child I was on a swing that just stopped dead mid-swing. I flew 5 metres and broke my wrist, but the adults seemed more interested in the Swing Event. Children break their wrists every day, I suppose.

I thought I should get up. In many ways my life has always been about trying to get up. I checked my wrist - not broken (but sore??) - and seeped into the lounge room. It looked strange at this hour and seemed unhappy to see me, like I was a parent interrupting a sleepover. I apologised and lay on the couch, deciding to look at everything in the room once. Curtains, books, table, mantle, flowers, [REDACTED], ceramic Dachshund. I could have sworn it was a Basset Fauve...? Jack

Ruby's wife was a Dachshund. Contemporary accounts of the Kennedy/Oswald imbroglio have not reckoned with this fact. Curtains, books, table... I was sweating, I realised. It was trickling out of my pits like espresso from a portafilter.

To the window, then. I opened it and more of the eternal-blue-metal light rushed in and splashes over everything. I shook it off my arms. There was no sound from outside but the wind's ragged hiss and the clattering of leaves. The houses were strewn and empty; dead husks. I once heard of a man who was looking for love in a field of corn. At the time I thought him optimistic but misguided.

On the street a figure moved. I watched it drift along. Where was it going? It stopped outside my window and turned slowly. Under the ragged strands of black hair was a face like a bag of milk

with two black holes in it. Something dripped from its chin. "Can't sleep?" it asked from one of the black holes. I shook my head. "Do we know each other?" it asked.

"I don't think so. What's your name?"

"Prunus the Closed-Hearted Ghost."

I shrugged and said I didn't know again. The espresso sweats were back.

"Funny," P the C-HG said, "I could have sworn..." And sloshed off.

It wasn't good that he recognised me. I looked out over the dead city with the no-moon not-shining and shut the window but I could still see it, and I closed the curtain but I still knew it was there, and I could go back to bed but I would never sleep again, I could avoid looking at the photograph on

the mantel but I couldn't... I was out of OPTIONS and I really wanted more OPTIONS. I wanted to cry but nothing came.

Months passed, maybe a year, waiting in the cold blue. I was out of options. And yet... I moved to the mantel and picked up her photo and held it and looked at it. "I really miss you," I said. And something brightened behind the window; something wet my cheeks.

