

Mt Buller Ratepayers Association

President's Report to Members

May 2025 to May 2026

Dear Members

This report provides members with an overview of the work undertaken by the Mt Buller Ratepayers Association (MBRA) and key achievements over the last year. I would like to start this report by thanking your committee members for their hard work this year. There is a lot of work that goes on behind the scenes to help make Mt Buller a better place for us all. They are listed at the end of this report.

In the interests of not boring the reader to death, I will not repeat the stated purpose and policies of MBRA. Those who are interested can find them at <https://mbra.au/policy-position-statement>.

In summary, the 2025-26 year has been a year of some good progress, some frustrations and disappointments, and a lot of platform building for the future. I will report on each of these in turn.

1. Good progress.

There have been a number of wins this year that should be recognised:

1. **The success of the Australian Winter Olympic Team;** You might think we are a little bold claiming credit for our best ever Winter Olympic performance. However, over 50% of the participants, including our own Jakara Anthony, began their racing careers in the Interschools programme that MBRA through the BIA, and the dedication of prior president Joel Dixon, continue to actively support. And many of these young people would not have been able to access the snow but for the network of club lodges that underpin our sport.
2. **The completion of a new draft leasing policy;** that provides a more realistic and balanced approach to lease renewal, giving more clarity to leaseholders. Thanks particularly for the considerable effort on all of our behalf by Searle Batten, Mark Bennetts and Bill Hazlett. We should also acknowledge the great work by Annie Volkering from ARV who guided the process.
3. **A more concerted approach to advocacy on your behalf;** In the 2025 financial year, leaseholders contributed approximately 60% of the total income to ARV at Mt Buller. As such, we believe we represent an important voice that should be heard and heeded. While our advocacy to ARV has not always been welcomed nor has there been a strong track record of our requests or advice being acted

upon, we are no longer being dismissed out of hand. We will continue to work productively to encourage ARV to act in our interests.

4. **The launch of the Ratepayers Ramble**; thanks to efforts of our Vice-President, Bernadette Kfouri we now have a more frequent and programmed approach to sharing relevant information with members. If you haven't signed up, please do so by clicking [HERE](#).
5. **Continued efforts to influence marketing and promotions**; through the Buller Stirling Marketing Committee, Bernadette Kfouri has worked tirelessly to achieve outcomes that are best for the whole mountain.
6. **Strong local relations with our Mt Buller Resort General Manager Alan Arthur**; while we have had an at time strained relationship with ARV, very little of this has been because of Alan who has always had an open ear and mind to improve the satisfaction of ratepayers at a local community level.
7. **Continued strong relationships with other stakeholder groups**; we have continued and deepened our shared understanding and joint advocacy with Buller Ski Lifts, Mt Buller Chamber of Commerce, Mansfield Shire Council, Victorian Snowsports Association ("VSA"), Alpine Resorts Industry Advisory Group ("ARIAG") and our peer residents associations at other resorts.

These small achievements do not fully reflect the effort that has been put in on your behalf. Unfortunately, much of what we have done, is yet to bear fruit.

2. Frustrations & Disappointments

Over the period, MBRA continued to advocate on behalf of stakeholders at Mt Buller on a range of issues that have yet to deliver a positive outcome. Notwithstanding the frustration and disappointment, we will continue to pursue the outcomes that are in the best interests of our community. The main issues that have been a source of disappointment are:

1. **Affordability and costs**: ARV commissioned a review of both the level and process of site service charges in May 2025. After almost a year of ARV and consultant activity, including person-weeks of effort by your committee, the decision was reached earlier this year to change nothing.

Since the establishment of ARV in September 2022, through the end of calendar 2025, where inflation has run at an average of 3.9% p.a.:

- a. ARV expenses have increased 22% or 6.9% p.a.
- b. Service charges have increased by 15.9% or 4.3% p.a.,
- c. Site rents; have increased 21%; or 6.6% p.a.

ARV disputes our numbers and claims to have a report that proves our calculations are incorrect, but so far have not provided us with this report. We have asked repeatedly for this reconciliation since May 2025.

One small win on this front is that ARV have informed us that ARV head office staff numbers are being reduced and more staff will be allocated to resort level activities in this year.

2. **Reinvestment in the community;** ARV constrained its expenditure on preserving Mt Buller's community assets from 2023 – 2025 by spending much less than depreciation. We believe assets such as roads, carparks, footpaths, bike paths and buildings have deteriorated as a result, and we continue to call for this expenditure to be "caught up" in the next few years.
3. **Water rights;** Goulburn Murray Water has refused to grant Mt Buller a year-round pumping licence for the Boggy Creek Reservoir. ARV continues to advocate on our behalf, but after a concerted year long effort has been unable to secure a positive outcome.
4. **A sustainable model of community funding;** Local Government Authorities across Australia receive between 15-30% of their community infrastructure funding from federal LGA grants. Mt Buller does not and recent attempts by ARV to allow us to qualify for even limited grants, has been declined by the state government.
5. **Community resources;** whilst we have garnered growing support from other stakeholder groups, we are yet to secure:
 - a. Government funded healthcare; the Buller community pays for our medical centre through service charges and patient out-of-pockets, while the same Urgent Care services are provided free of charge across the state health system.
 - b. Public Transport; there is no public transport beyond Mansfield, an inequity compared to numerous other seasonal communities.
 - c. Education; the Mansfield Secondary Mt Buller Annex has been withdrawn for the 2026 season, despite strong advocacy from Mt Buller and Mansfield Shire.
6. **A sustainable funding model for ARV;** Since its foundation, ARV has operated under a "letter of comfort" for any deficits it incurred. ARV was charged with developing a sustainable financial model within three years of its foundation. It submitted such a plan to Government. This plan was rejected in the recent budget and a new "letter of comfort" was issued for the current 12 months, kicking the can down the road on a sustainable funding model for Alpine communities.

In summary, state and federal government agencies do not recognise our important seasonal community, that contributes to a \$2.1bn industry that supports 22,000 regional jobs, as worthy of being treated equitably with other communities.

The statutory authority that currently manages the Mt Buller community, ARV, is governed by a Board that is answerable to the Minister for the Environment. By their own admission, the ARV Board balances the interests of community members against a range of competing objectives, and of a diverse range of stakeholders. We recognize the structural constraint this places on ARV.

Consequently, we will continue to work constructively to help their advocacy efforts, and work around them where necessary to achieve what we consider to be in the best interest of our community.

3. Platform Building

Over the last year we have engaged in a number of activities that we believe will bear fruit in years to come. The main efforts in this regard include:

1. **Establishing a clear structure of working groups** to pursue improvements in:
 - a. *Marketing and Membership* led by Bernadette Kfoury; the team has increased our distribution list subscriptions by 70% this year. This year, watch out for the first version of our Annual Member Satisfaction survey.
 - b. *Policy and Master Planning* led by Richard Leder; this team has invested person-months of effort responding to requests for input on topics including Service Charges, Leasing Policy, ARV Strategy, ARV Budgets, Safety Inspections, Transport policy and the Mt Buller Secondary Annex.
 - c. *Networking and Advocacy* led by Mark Buckley where this team has worked to activate influencers across and beyond the Alpine community.

In addition to the above three working groups, we have established a fourth working group to specifically address support for Club Lodges their sustainability and support systems.


2. **Creation of a clear policy platform and advocacy priorities** which have enabled us to communicate consistently with interested parties. Our three priorities for the past year, to be reviewed by the incoming committee in May 2026, were:
 - a. To reduce costs of access and participation at Mt Buller for all stakeholders and visitors by delivering efficiencies within ARV and outsourcing services that can be provided more efficiently by others.
 - b. Increased government financial support for Mt Buller to improve essential services like public shelters, transportation, medical facilities, and restrooms, ensuring ARV maintains high standards at the resort.
 - c. A sustainable approach to tourism and snow activities including expanding snowmaking with a reliable water supply and introducing new visitor experiences, while attracting investments from both private and public sectors.
3. **Finalising the refresh of our rules of association**; which has been an outstanding issue for several years and has endeavoured to increase the body of members so that the Association now represents a broader cohort of ratepayers who will give more voice to our issues. We have been through an extensive process of development and consultation re the rules which will provide a more workable platform for the coming decades.
4. **Bringing a solution on Insurance to our members**; we are very close, thanks to the work of many committee members over several years, including former committee member Chris Hollier, to having a provider who will provide access to an 'insurance mutual' that holds the promise of providing adequate cover at

more affordable costs. We anticipate this being available to members before the end of season 2026.

5. ***Building understanding and a coalition of support for the things we need;*** whilst we haven't delivered outcomes on issues like public transport, LGA funding, healthcare, and water rights, the arguments for these things are now well understood and support is growing and broadening. We will continue to position Mt Buller as a regional seasonal community that matters, and advocate for being treated as such.

In closing, I would like to thank again the committee for their hard work, and our members for continuing to believe in the work that we do. I will be delivering a version of these comments at our Annual General Meeting on 26th of May 2026 where I will be happy to take questions on any matters raised herein.

I look forward to enjoying a great season with you.



Ian McCall
President MBRA.

On behalf of Committee Members:

Fiona Ashton
Rob Aivatoglou
Craig Bartle
Searle Batten
Mark Bennetts
Mark Buckley
Scott Carmichael
Joel Dixon
Timothy Drew
Ron Edwards
Alistair Guss
Bernadette Kfourri
Richard Leder
Ian McCall
Andrew Perkins
Stuart Worn