

Setting sail on the good ship Terrier in 2021

What lies ahead for The Terrier in 2021? New voices, a new project and tackling unfinished business.

Thanks to grant win, the Terrier is turning up the volume

The Terrier wins funding from the \$100 million Judith Neilson Institute to hire a cadet Indigenous journalist.

Starting again...



[dropcap style="font-size: 35px; color: #8cc7d0;"] Most of you will remember **Bluestone Magazine**, a small start-up that brought an online, fully independent magazine to south-west Victoria in 2013.

By the time it closed in late 2016, Bluestone Magazine was making a name for itself as a place where you could enjoy a quality read about people within your community and also find out what was really going on, as we were not afraid to dig deeper into local issues.

Sticking your neck out in a small community is not an easy thing to do, but I think it is something that journalists and writers have to do if they are true to their profession, so I am sticking my neck out again. (You can find out [more about my background](#) here.)

This website is an experiment to see if south-west Victoria still wants an independent voice.

I have been lucky to harness some great writers to help me out, including experienced former Fairfax and Crikey journalist **Lee Nicholson** who will specialise in writing about the **local live music scene** (picking up where she left off more

than 20 years ago when she started a music column with the local newspaper).



Former Fairfax and Crikey.com journalist Lee Nicholson has recently returned to Warrnambool and will write about the local live music scene.

Local identity and passionate op-shopper **Bill Abrahams** will write an occasional, humorous column on the world of collecting, op-shops and the joys of finding that irresistible bargain.

I will also be bringing you stories about **people, politics** and **guest writers** who will air their spleen on all manner of topics. Yep, I like a bit of variety!

There will be no 'editions' as such, instead I will publish small batches of fresh stories as they are written.

If you would like to have the story links sent straight to your inbox, [join the mailing list here.](#)

I am not going to charge to read the stories, but if you want to make a donation you can do so here:

[Make a donation](#)

So here we go, starting again, stretching the arms, legs and

heart.

I hope you enjoy it.

Carol Attmann

When scrutiny is sub-standard, democracy suffers



Image: The Florida Times-Union.

Something very troubling is happening in our community when it comes to the local media's scrutiny of those in power.

Since returning to Warrnambool in January, I have watched with growing disbelief at the apparent reticence of our once-proud local newspaper, The Standard, to go in hard and ask the tough questions of our leaders.

This is what journalists do. This is the role of the so-called 'Fourth Estate' – to be the watchdog of the powerful and give

voice to the powerless.

It is an essential part of our democracy and ensures that we retain an open, transparent and accountable government – on all levels.



This past week, we saw national scrutiny of MPs' spending, sparked by revelations that Prime Minister Abbott had claimed allowances for trips to weddings, triathlons and cycling events.

Was our local federal MP **Dan Tehan** asked by our paper to detail the \$873,992.35 that he spent from 2010-12? No, instead this figure was not even mentioned, but rather [the paper's story \(10/10\)](#) reassured us that he had claimed \$321,000 in 'legitimate government entitlements'. End of story.

There is no suggestion that Mr Tehan used his allowance improperly, but nor is it improper for a journalist to forensically examine this spending. This is exactly what independent journalist **Margot Kingston** did when she [broke the story](#) about Tony Abbott claiming more than \$9000 in taxpayer funds to promote his book.

It is only by drilling down into the detail that all the facts can come to light.



Mayor Michael
Neoh. Image: ABC.

Earlier this year, Warrnambool Mayor **Michael Neoh** visited China as part of a Sister City relationship with Changchun. Shortly after his return, [The Standard ran a story \(29/6\)](#) about Mr Neoh visiting his ancestral home in China and catching up with relatives.

Was this part of the official tour for which ratepayers paid \$3500 for both Mr Neoh and Council CEO **Bruce Anson**?

Did Mr Neoh pay for this portion of the trip himself? Again, there is no suggestion of impropriety by Mr Neoh, but we don't know the answer to these questions because, it appears, they weren't asked.*

And when others *do* ask the prickly, difficult questions, the response is sometimes extraordinary.

Last month, **Cr Peter Sycopoulis** and several council colleagues questioned whether Mayor Neoh and Mr Anson needed to attend a Sister City function in Japan – expected to cost ratepayers \$4000 – given they had just been to China.

For this, the councillors were chastised by the newspaper as [being 'party poopers'](#) (11/11). What?

And let's not forget the infamous '[Wilma Wright' letters to the editor](#)'. These were published by The Standard for four years – four years – without anybody apparently checking the identity of the author, who was revealed as Mr Anson's son and who at one point used the cover of his pseudonym to openly attack several councillors, including Cr Sycopoulis, in the lead up to a council election.

(Mr Anson, it must be noted, was cleared of any involvement in his son's activities).



Cr Peter Sycopoulis

The names in this column – Mr Tehan, Mayor Neoh, Mr Anson – are irrelevant: it is the public, important positions that they hold that makes them open to scrutiny and a higher standard of accountability.

This is the hard work of journalism.

It is much harder, more time consuming and nerve-wrecking than writing story after story about courts and crime (ie. the powerless) where all of the leg work has been done, yet it is critical if we are to have faith in our media as the watchdog it is intended to be.

If it fails in this task, it is nothing less than our democracy which suffers.

* *The Warrnambool City Council has since confirmed to Bluestone that Mayor Neoh did fund this portion of his travel.*

Disclosures:

- I began my journalism career as a cadet at The Standard in 1989.
- I was an open supporter of ALP candidate Michael Barling during the last federal election because I thought he was the best option for Wannon. It was the first time I voted Labor in many years: I normally vote Green.
- I know Cr Sycopoulis through his family: his older sisters and I went to school together.

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