



# Staying Connected

Issue 78, January 2026

## NEW YEAR GREETINGS

We hope you have all had a good start to the New Year.

For those so inclined, this coming year is the Year of the Horse, commencing after Lunar New Year on Tuesday 17 February. If you were born in 1942 (I won't go back any earlier!), 1954, 1966 etc, you are a Horse.

According to Chinese astrology, "Horse is confident, agreeable, and responsible, although they also tend to dislike being reined in by others. They're fit and intelligent, adoring physical and mental exertion; they're decisive but also easily swayed and impatient." Is this correct from your experience?

As always, member contributions are welcome, and thank you to Megan Nelson and Margaret Munoz for getting the ball rolling with their articles.

This year is going to be one of the most exciting years in Probus' history – 50 years of providing connection and friendship since 1976, when the first Australian Probus Club was formed at Hunters Hill on 3<sup>rd</sup> February.

Your Management Committee has already been busy planning our own event for Tuesday 3 February, with a free Brunch Celebration from 9.30am at Abbotsford Quarantine Reserve. We look forward to seeing you there.

Best wishes

John Baker (Newsletter Officer)

## FEBRUARY GUEST SPEAKER "SCAM AWARENESS - YOUR BEST DEFENCE" Charles Fellner

Charles is a retired IT professional. His presentations focus on the more common scams. He explains what goes on behind these scams, the steps to take to avoid being scammed, and what to do if you have been scammed.

He has a strong interest in the psychology of scamming and believes this is a crucial and often overlooked aspect of the puzzle.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Russell Lea Probus Club acknowledges the Wangal people of the Eora Nation as the traditional custodians of the lands on which we meet and we pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging.

## THE GENESIAN THEATRE STORY

Megan Nelson

The Genesian Theatre opened on 29 January 1945 with the play 'The Comedian' by Henri Ghèon, a drama about St. Genesius, reputedly martyred by Diocletian in the year 303 A.D. The theatre is named for St Genesius, Patron Saint of Actors.

For 70 years the Company operated from the former St. John the Evangelist Church in Kent St, an historic 1868 church with a long tradition as a theatre in the heart of the Sydney CBD.

In January 2025, the Genesian Theatre Company moved to its new home at St Joseph's Church Hall, in Gordon Street, Rozelle.

This move has seen members of our club keen to attend productions due to the very convenient location and a suggestion from one of our newer members. During 2025, members have enjoyed a variety of productions from mystery to musical! We schedule the 4.30pm Sunday afternoon performance and, after the play, take a five minute walk to the Merton Hotel for dinner - a lovely finish to the week-end.

In 2026, the program of plays covers a great mix of classic, reworked and new pieces including The Murder of Roger Ackroyd, 18 Eden Ave, The Admirable Crichton, To Kill a Mockingbird, The Complete Works of Jane Austen (Abridged), Captain Corelli's Mandolin and Yerma. Tickets are reasonably priced - around \$33 for Seniors.

Why not consider coming along to one, two or all the plays in 2026?

Further details can be found at: <https://genesiantheatre.com.au>.



## FOR YOUR DIARY



### SPECIAL EVENT

#### Tuesday, 3 February 2026

Brunch Celebration marking 50 years of Probus in Australia, Abbotsford Quarantine Reserve. 9.30am. Save the date and more details to follow via WhatsApp.

### REGULAR EVENTS

#### Tuesday, 3 February 2026

(and every first Tuesday of month)  
Let's Talk About Books, 2pm, Canada Bay Club.

#### Friday, 13 February 2026

Let's Do Lunch at noon. The Stone Restaurant, Barnwell Park Golf Club. Look for RSVP on WhatsApp.

#### Monday, 16 February 2026

(and every third Monday)  
Walking off the Festive Feasts (9:15am) and/or Coffee@Carmels (10:00am), 284 Great North Road, Abbotsford

#### Thursday, 26 February 2026

First 2026 Monthly Meeting, Club Five Dock at 10.30am. Guest Speaker: Charles Fellner, "Scam awareness - your best defence".

#### Thursday, 5 March 2026

(and every second Thursday of month)  
Russell Lea Knitters, at the home of Margaret Munoz, 3/7 Checkley Street, Abbotsford. More details in separate article.

#### Thursday, 26 March 2026

Annual General Meeting, Club Five Dock

### 2026 MONTHLY MEETING DATES

Fourth Thursday of the month at 10.30am at Club Five Dock

26 February	23 July
26 March	27 August
23 April	24 September
28 May	22 October
25 June	26 November

## NOW IN SEASON

In some ways late January-February is an even better month for fruit than December-January.

The big difference is that grapes are much sweeter and more crunchy. What is most interesting is the almost complete transition to seedless varieties, with only a few seeded Red Globes remaining, mainly for the Asian markets, due to their size. Good eating green, red and black grapes are all available.

Stone fruit (peaches, plums and nectarines) are abundant, although the apricot season has basically finished. Some of the best eating stone fruit is harvested in February.

Excellent cherries from Tasmania and southern Victoria should continue until at least mid-February, as cold weather in the south has delayed harvest. Good news for consumers.

Mangoes are still readily available, with the main supply coming from lower parts of the Queensland coast. The Australian-bred varieties - Kensington Pride, Calypso, Honey Gold and R2E2 – are better eating, compared with varieties such as Keitt.

Berries, melons and a range of tropical fruits are all in season.

Early new-season apples (Gala) are starting to appear, although better eating quality is yet to emerge.



## FAMOUS QUOTE

*"We should be a more collective body. I've always asked people 'Why is it only at a time of crisis, we need each other? Why can't we need each other and love each other in normal times'".*

*Tom Uren, POW on the Thai-Burma Railway, social justice campaigner, environmentalist and member of Federal Parliament 1958-1990*  
*From "The Courageous Life of Weary Dunlop" by Peter Fitzsimons*

## WHERE IS IT?

### Clue

Bales on Australia's largest cotton farm

### Last month

Singapore Botanic Gardens



## RUSSELL LEA KNITTERS

### Organised by Margaret Munoz

**Russell Lea Knitters** will reconvene every second Thursday afternoon, commencing on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> March, and will meet at Margaret's home, 3/7 Checkley St. Abbotsford from 2.30pm.

In 2024 we knitted squares for 10 blankets which were distributed to the **Rev. Bill Crews Foundation at Ashfield** as well as **Wrap With Love**, an amazing Australian organisation based in Sydney, who send blankets worldwide wherever there is need.

You only need to be able to do the plain knitting stitch and all wool will be provided. The squares need Size 8 (4mm) knitting needles but there will be a few pairs available if you don't have any. See the pattern here: <https://wrapwithlove.org/patterns>. (Should you want to start knitting on your own before March 5th please contact Margaret on the number below for wool.)



We will knit and chat with a cuppa and a purpose. You can sit in the sun on the patio overlooking the water if the weather permits or be comfy indoors.

Please text Margaret on **0438 713 195** (or respond through the WhatsApp group that will be formed) in the morning of the day you are attending.

Let's see how many blankets Russell Lea Probus can contribute this year!

**(Please do not attend if you have symptoms or have been with someone who is sick.)**

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## SAVING AUSTRALIA'S KOALAS: A BREAKTHROUGH VACCINE FOR AN ENDANGERED ICON A Good News New Year Story



*Professor Peter Timms and healthy friend*

Professor Peter Timms, a globally recognised microbiologist, has developed a groundbreaking chlamydia vaccine to combat the rapid decline of Australian koala populations.

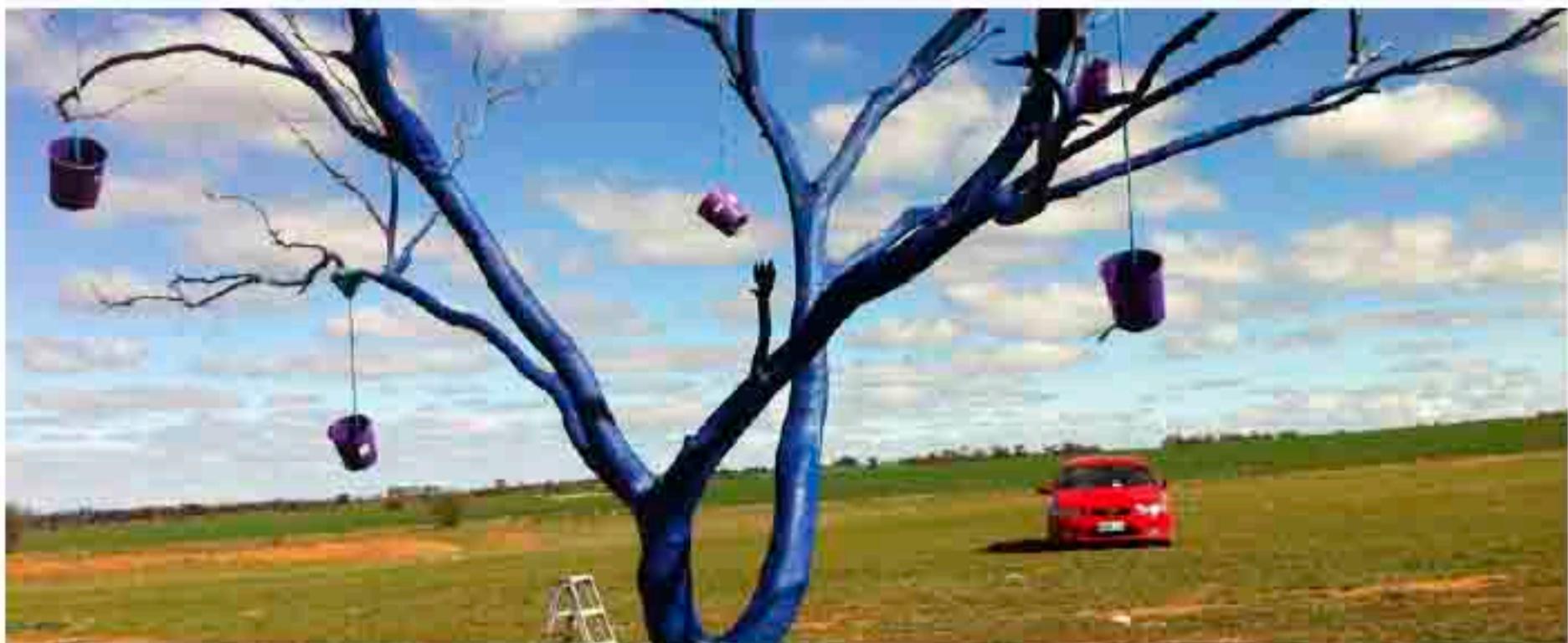
Listed as endangered in eastern Australia in 2022, koalas face infection rates of up to 60 per cent in Queensland and New South Wales. This innovative vaccine directly targets the disease driving population collapse, offering a practical, scalable tool to reverse losses in high-risk regions.

Developed through decades of research, the vaccine achieved regulatory approval in June 2025 — the first of its kind for wild populations. Phase III trials demonstrated a 64 per cent reduction in deaths, alongside higher reproduction and survival rates.

Beyond saving koalas, the project is generating vital data for global wildlife health and conservation, providing a science-based model for species protection and positioning Australia as a leader in wildlife disease management.

Reprinted from <https://www.shapingaustraliaawards.com.au/finalists/saving-australias-koalas-a-breakthrough-vaccine-for-an-endangered-icon-unisc>

## THE BLUE TREE STORY



*The original blue tree painted by Jayden and Tjarda*

As you take the highways and byways of this great country you are likely to see a dead tree or two that has been painted a distinctive blue.

Blue Trees, now standing across the globe, are powerful symbols of mental health awareness - silent yet unwavering reminders that you're not alone. There are currently 1,492 registered Blue Trees around the world.

The story behind these trees is quite important, moving and inspirational. The following excerpt is taken from The Blue Tree Project web site:

"Blue Tree Project" began in 2019, inspired by a heartfelt story shared at the funeral of Jayden Whyte, who tragically lost his life to suicide in 2018. The tale of the original blue tree began as a light-hearted moment between Jayden and his friend, Tjarda.

Together, they painted a dead tree blue on Jayden's family farm in Western Australia's Wheatbelt region as a playful prank back in 2014. What started as an act of fun and mischief has since transformed into something profoundly meaningful.

From that moment, the Blue Tree Project has grown into a movement dedicated to changing the way we approach mental health. The blue trees, once a symbol of laughter, have evolved into a powerful symbol of hope, connection, and awareness.

Each Tree encourages open conversations, reminds us to check in on ourselves, and stands as visual prompts to support those who may be struggling.

The Blue Trees are a symbol of hope, not loss".

Be inspired at <https://bluetreeproject.com.au/> where you can also read more about the Original Blue Tree, written and shared by Tjarda Tiedeken at Jayden's funeral.

The web site also details how to go about painting a Blue Tree, including how Wattyl Paint provides free signature 'Blue Tree' paint.

## INSPIRING STORIES FROM VIETNAM

John Baker

Recently I was privileged to attend an evening hosted by the Fred Hollows Foundation.

Highlights of the evening at the Mitchell Library were two very special guests from Vietnam.

Now 42 year old Tran Van Giap was a seven year old in 1992 when Fred Hollows undertook life-saving surgery, captured in the iconic photo by photographer Michael Amendolia.

Giap, accompanied by his 12 year old son, who captivated the audience (in English), went on to become the first family member to attend University. He is now a maths teacher.

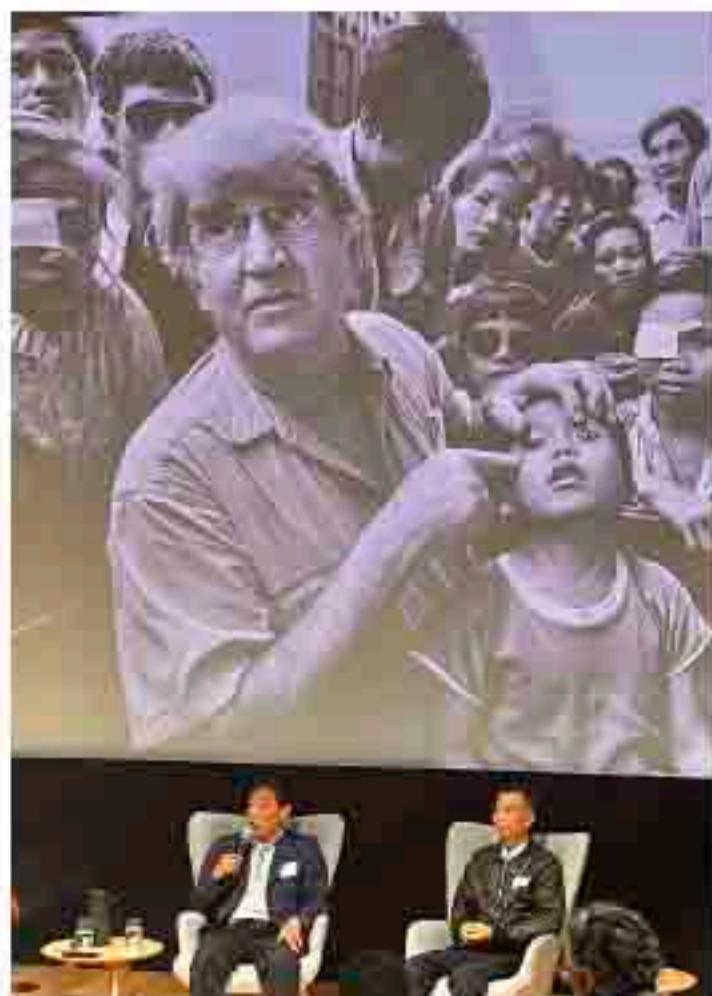
Dr Phuc Huynh Tan is an ophthalmologist and East Asia Director at the Fred Hollows Foundation since 2003. In 1995 he was one of only two ophthalmologists in Vietnam; now he says there are thousands. Across East Asia the Foundation has restored sight for hundreds of thousands, trained thousands and built, equipped or renovated 315 facilities.

A major milestone was achieved in 2024 in Vietnam when the country was declared trachoma-free by the World Health Organisation.

Fred Hollows was a fierce advocate for indigenous Australians and his efforts continue through the Foundation. In 2024 almost 16,000 people were screened, 3,288 operations and treatments delivered, including cataracts, diabetic retinopathy treatments, trachoma operations and over 7,000 other interventions.

Training for health workers, teachers and children were also important components.

Michael Amendolia also spoke at the evening. He now works for the Foundation, describing his role as a "Sight Restoration Story Teller" through photography.



Dr Tan (left) and Mr Giap address the audience beneath the iconic 1992 photo.