

## 2019 Annual Course Report

A quick recap on the year that was 2019. I would like to begin by thanking all the volunteers who have helped not only on the golf course but with me personally and making my first full year at the Club both productive and enjoyable. I cannot forget my green's staff Garry, Chad and Damian. The work all three men put into the Club and the course is impressive and most appreciated; it is a pleasure to work with them. I am more than pleased with Damian our apprentice and his progress as he is showing immense skill on the tools and developing leadership qualities as well. Damian now enters his final year of his apprenticeship.

My main focus when I first started at the Club was to get a feel for the golf course and how certain areas are to be maintained and with what techniques and products, but also how the membership like their golf course to be presented. Both the team and I continue to reach for higher quality on all areas of the course but on behalf of the green's team I hope all members are happy with the golf course and its progression. I am working closely with the green's committee to ensure we continue to improve and develop the course.

We started 2019 with preparations in full swing for the NSW Mid-Amateur. A few changes were made to the golf course in terms of greens surrounds and fairway shapes. These changes came on the back of Golf NSW recommendations. Since the completion of the Mid-Amateur feedback from members was that they liked the changes so most of the new shapes have been maintained. The Mid-Amateur event itself was a success for the Club, delivering a well presented golf course for all players, a beautiful club to host presentations and social gatherings after each days play and the big one for me was the exposure of the Club to visitors who didn't know we existed or weren't aware of the quality of the facility we have here at Shoalhaven Heads GC. Preparing and presenting a golf course for an event like this was something new for Garry, Chad and Damian which all three were more than up to the task of completing. Preparations began in late 2018 right up until April when the event was held. During the event, the green's staff would be in around 3am to prepare for the days play and then return at 4pm to work through the night to be ready for the next day's play. A job well done and for their first major event they handled the pressure very well.

During the cool season of 2019, we also took on board the suggestions from Golf NSW with regards to some of our bunkers and their positioning on the course. These included the right side fairway bunker on 5, the right side fairway bunker on 9 and the left side fairway bunker on 13. The bunkers on 5 and 13 were deemed to be serving no or very little purpose and were only taking up staff time to maintain. It was decided that these bunkers be filled in. The bunker on the 9<sup>th</sup> hole was filled in to improve play from the tee. Opening up the right side of the fairway

gave players a wider area to aim off the tee but also defer players from aiming down the left side of the fairway where the 2<sup>nd</sup> tee then comes into danger. There have been other minor changes to other bunkers like the first bunker on the 2<sup>nd</sup>. The steep sand face was replaced with a turf face, making it easier to both play from and maintain. Another bunker was the fairway bunker in the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> hole. Again the sand face was replaced with turf mainly to control erosion which posed a real hazard for golfers and staff as well as exposing parts of our underground irrigation pipe. Other bunkers like these have been identified on the golf course and will be renovated in the near future.

A major change which is easily gone unnoticed by anyone who is not on the green's staff is how the greens are actually maintained. The amount of watering has decreased. Instead of being watered every night, they are now watered heavily every few nights and hand watered with hoses on areas of the greens that require extra moisture. They are then left to dry before watering again. This assists with disease pressure and thatch build up as well as improving the root system, speed and firmness of the greens. Obviously during the cooler months of the year, greens are watered very little. Consistent grooming and scarifying is carried out, mainly through spring and summer. I have also recently started to lightly dust the greens with sand which also helps with disease and thatch control. I am looking to do away with the big renovation of greens in September and apply consistent minor renovations throughout the year. Greens recover from minor renovations within a few days rather than waiting a few weeks like we do with the major renovations. All of these cultural practices I am using are hopefully going to ease the pressure on our greens and make them stronger against pests and diseases. This will ultimately mean I can save money and time by not using as much chemical to control pests as well as being more environmentally friendly.

Over the past 12 months the team and I have worked particularly hard in bringing our tees up to an improved standard. It is taking some time, but I think we are starting to win the battle. Our tees were full of weeds which was a major factor. Eradicating the weeds and then getting new turf to grow over has taken some time. Heavy top dressing has been a major key as well as consistent fertilising. A reminder to all those who play, it is a massive help to us if divots are repaired after your shot has been played. This helps speed up the recovery of healthy turf. Being able to utilise different courses for each golf event has been great as well. Pushing markers from the blue or red course to the yellow and white helps spread the wear and allows turf to recover faster. Towards the end of 2019 I decided the 8<sup>th</sup> tee needed to be stripped, new soil applied, and fresh turf laid. This tee had very little turf left on it to grow back in. In addition to new turf, we also decided to frame the tee with native vegetation as we have done in other various areas of the golf course. The 8<sup>th</sup> tee along with other areas will continue to be planted out to create a bit of character to these areas as well as provide habitats for native wildlife.

The volunteers as I mentioned earlier have been great. Pathways around the course have been built and/or upgraded. New pathways include behind the 4<sup>th</sup> tee, in between the 1<sup>st</sup> green and 2<sup>nd</sup> tee, a new turning circle at the men's 5<sup>th</sup> tee and also at the 6<sup>th</sup> tee. The pathway from the 2<sup>nd</sup> green to the 3<sup>rd</sup> tee was recently upgraded too. Further paths have been planned to be built in 2020. Other areas on the course which have been driven by volunteers are the maintenance of our rubbish and sand bins. This also includes top dressing of tees on a Monday after the weekends play. Other tasks that are carried out are rough cutting in the summer as well as debris removal from bunkers, surrounds and greens, the maintenance of gardens and the club house surrounds plus much more. There are other projects in planning for volunteers to be involved in which I am excited about. I will keep the membership updated on these throughout my reports during the year. I would also like to thank our Vets and Ladies committees for their support in 2019. Several items and tools were purchased thanks to kind donations from both parties. Some items include injection systems, new flags and a moisture meter designed for reading moisture content in the soil (mainly used on greens). Thank you again.

To assist with our irrigation practices and efficiency, 3 new injection systems were purchased and installed. These systems inject wetting agent into the water as it passes through the irrigation system and is applied through the sprinklers. The wetting agent helps water penetrate the hard dry surface allowing water to get into the root zone where it has the most impact on turf health. After just one week of installing the system I could see an improvement in turf health and presentation. It also allows me to use less water during the spring and summer period.

A huge area of the club I have been involved in with our Secretary Alan Davies as well as members of the board is WHS (Work Health and Safety). Whether we like it or not, WHS is part of all our working lives now and is a very important part of any business. Alan and I work closely to ensure the safety of not only our staff and volunteers but the safety of our members too. If you are a volunteer, you are still considered an employee of the club and must abide by all policies set out by the clubs management. I am pleased with the response from members, volunteers and staff in regard to WHS and the changes we have implemented. It is not easy to adapt to these changes, but it is up to all of us to keep up the good work. If you are considering becoming a volunteer on the course, please feel free to knock on my door for a chat and I will have you inducted to start work!

To round off 2019 we experienced another drought, which basically rolled in as part of a 2018 drought, as well as probably the worst bush fires NSW has ever seen. The main thing is we all stayed safe and we still have a golf course and club to come to. As far as maintaining a golf

course goes, it has been a challenging year in regard to extreme weather patterns. I mentioned earlier how pleased I am with my team, but they really have gone above and beyond in 2019 to ensure we present the best course possible for our members and guests. A lot of their efforts and hard work can go unintentionally unnoticed and the majority of work is done before most people get out of bed. I am confident they will give the club and I the same effort in 2020. I am a big believer that we can always improve and that is what we are striving for in 2020. I am excited for the year ahead and the improvements we can achieve on the golf course.

**Keenan Hobbs**

**Course Superintendent**