



“From the GM’s Desk” 25th June 2015



Mayor, Cr Lewis and Manager of Tourism and Development, Phil Johnston are in Sydney today for a meeting with the Minister for Regional Development, the Hon. John Barilaro, MP to discuss the impact of the drought. The meeting has been organised by NSW Farmers and will include other interest groups such as the CWA. Cr Lewis and Phil will join representatives from Coonamble Shire and will also be speaking on behalf of the Brewarrina and Walgett Shires.

The focus on the meeting will be the effects of the drought on the communities and in particular its effects on small business.

A number of the sporting grounds had to be closed last weekend due to the wet conditions. The closures were put in place to ensure the safety of participants and protect the playing surfaces. Council is appreciative of the cooperation and understanding of those sports which were affected.

At the Council meeting held on Monday, 22nd June the Mayor, Cr Andrew Lewis officiated over a Citizenship Ceremony for Johnathon, Elizabeth and Elijah Hoffman. Following the ceremony all the family joined Council for lunch.

Monday’s Council Meeting was attended by Ken Harrison who is a Local Engagement Officer with the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office.

Ken was able to update Council on the role of the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office and his address was well received by Council and he provided the opportunity for Council to ask questions in relation to the water issues.

The recent rain was very welcome and although different falls were recorded across the Shire and in surrounding Shires it was very beneficial and welcome by all. The rain resulted in wide spread closure of the unsealed road network across the western part of the state.

There were a few people who were either unaware of the closures or chose to ignore them and found themselves bogged.

All Councils within the West of the state are very good in supplying advice regarding road closures and this advice is relayed to the adjacent Council and also placed on their websites.

Following a lead from Cobar Shire Bourke Shire will include a link from its website to the neighbouring Councils to make it easier to access the road condition updates.

Included in the reports to Council on Monday was the suggestion that Council should again evaluate the option of building additional weir capacity for Bourke and that could take the form of raising the height of the existing weir or the possible construction of a new weir. Council had a preliminary report in relation to both options undertaken some time ago and will now seek to update that report so that it has the required information to hand should funding opportunities become available.

The generosity of the Bourke Community never ceases to amaze me with a number of fundraisers recently held reaching over the \$8000.00 dollar mark and apart from these major fundraisers there were a number of others which also raised significant funds.

Speaking of fundraisers the "Tour de OROC" was so successful in 2013 involving a pushbike tour through all twelve (12) of the members of the Orana Regional Organisation of Council (OROC) Local Government area that the event will again be held in October 2015 and will raise funds for Macquarie Homestay. This is accommodation being built for patients or family of patients having treatment at Dubbo Hospital and will to enable them to stay close to the hospital. A number of people from this area will no doubt benefit from the availability of the accommodation.

I think Bourke raised the most of any of the communities visited in 2013 as part of the Tour de OROC which is again testimony of the generosity of the people within the town of Bourke. Mayor, Cr Andrew Lewis was joined by several local riders including Mark Gordon and John Bartley in completing the ride through part of the Shire and no doubt will again be in solid training for October. Former Bourke High School Deputy Principal, Geoff Michelle undertook the ride from boundary to boundary and it is hoped to have someone available in 2015 to undertake the same role. There a couple of keen riders at the High School and they may be encouraged to undertake the role this year.

The parts required to repair the Jandra have arrived and it is hoped to have the vessel operational as soon as possible. The unfortunate breakdown has resulted in a number of tourists being unable to enjoy the river cruise and also resulted in a loss of revenue for Council in one of the peak tourist periods.

Council staff will be undertaking additional work on behalf of the Roads and Maritime Services on State Highway north of Enngonia. The advice of the work was certainly very welcome by Council and provides both Council and a number of local contactors the opportunity to ensure that their plant is fully utilised.

Council staff members are evaluating the suitability of a number of new computer systems for utilisation for its accounting and other functions. Council's current system is very dated in computer terms and while it is being maintained is not updated at all. Council has been looking at the options for an upgrade for some time now and whilst over the past few years there have been

limited options a number of suppliers are looking at the smaller sized Councils with a view to catering for this market. There are a number of other Councils in the region who are also in a similar position as Bourke and the opportunity for a joint purchase has been one of the possibilities being discussed.

Work on the Cuttaburra Bridge was disrupted by the recent rainfall but the contactors have been on site and completed much of the work and subject to any additional rainfall should be completed over the next two (2) weeks.

There is no further news on the re-establishment of an air service for Bourke save for the fact that the evaluation process is still continuing which in itself is a positive. Expressions of interest from airlines interested in providing the services to Bourke and Walgett closed in April.

The end of the financial year is a challenge for all those in business with everyone ensuring that accounts relating to 2014/2015 and received or issued so that can be properly accounted for prior to the roll over to 2015/2016. Council asks all those who have outstanding accounts for goods and services purchased by Council to send them in for payment.

Following the receipt of all the necessary building materials work has commenced on the repairs to the grandstand at Davidson Oval and it is hoped to have the work finalised by the end of July.

The recent rainfall has seen the ground tank at Byrock receive a much needed inflow with around two (2) metres flowing into what was previously a dry tank. Carting of water continued whilst the run off had time to settle and hopefully there will be enough water in the tank to last for at least the next two (2) months subject of course to future rain fall being received.

Council at the meeting held on Monday, 22nd June resolved not to submit a "Fit for the Future" proposal at this time. For the eight (8) Councils in the Far West Initiative the submission of a proposal was optional and Council's decision not to submit a proposal was consistent with the decision of the other seven (7) Councils. Council will continue working through what is known as "template Three" for Councils who meet the criteria for a Rural Council and will be looking at service delivery and in particular ways to improve efficiency and productivity

The erosion of services from rural NSW has been an ongoing concern of mine for a number of years. We have seen a contraction of services to a number of regional centres to the detriment of the communities of a number of the smaller centres. The loss of one or two jobs may not seem to be significant but when the cumulative impact of these and similar job losses is considered they have major impact on the town and our economy.

Whilst things such as economy of scale must be considered the access to essential services particularly those provided by government agencies should something that is available all people not just those along the eastern seaboard.

The concept of the “sandstone curtain” is often quoted and refers to the Great Dividing Range and quite often you speak to people on the other side that have little understanding of the lack of services and distances required to be travelled in this part of the state.

Thought for the week!

A person who never made a mistake, never tried anything new- Albert Einstein

Ross Earl
General Manager