



“From the GM’s Desk” 2nd July 2015



Mayor, Cr Lewis and Manager of Tourism and Development, Phil Johnston joined representatives from Coonamble Shire and representatives from NSW Farmers in a meeting with the Minister for Regional Development, the Hon. John Barrilaro, MP at Parliament House last Thursday to discuss the impact of the drought on the communities in this part of the state.

The meeting was very positive with the Minister gaining further understanding of the issues impacting on the communities which have been impacted by drought.

Bourke Shire Council has been a leading advocate for assistance for those landowners and businesses who have felt the financial impact of the extended dry conditions. Whilst we have had good rain over the past month it doesn’t suddenly stop the impact of long term drought conditions with the recovery period for those impacted by drought likely to be quite long.

The work in repairing the Jandra has taken a little longer than anticipated, however the works should be completed and the vessel boat is back in operation later in the week.

Bourke Shire Council was one of a number of Councils in New South Wales who submitted an expression of interest in relation for funding under the Regional Tourism Infrastructure Program - Airports and were successful in being selected to proceed to the second stage of the selection process.

Council’s Expression of Interest related to improvements to both the runway and lighting system at the Bourke Airport. The applications for the second stage close in August and Council will be required to supply a much more comprehensive submission in an effort to maximise its opportunity to be able to secure a share of the available funding which has increased from \$50 Million to \$94 Million in recognition of the high standard of the proposals submitted.

A briefing session for the Councils selected for the second round was held in Sydney on Monday and Bourke was represented by Phil Johnston, Manager of Tourism and Development. The purpose of the briefing was to more fully explain what was expected in the second round proposals.

The Annual Enngonia Race meeting has had to be cancelled for the fourth time in six (6) years due to wet weather which is astonishing given we have experienced drought conditions for much of that time.

The wet weather at Enngonia had initially meant that the meeting would be transferred to Bourke Race Track which was still in great condition following the Back to Bourke Race Meeting.

However, the heavy rain received on Monday night meant that the Bourke track was also far too wet for plans to continue which was obviously very disappointing for the committee who had worked so hard to host the race meeting.

There has been a significant change to the way in which Workers Compensation Premiums for larger businesses are to be calculated from 2015/2016. Council's Worker's Compensation Insurers, StateCover, ran a number of seminars across the state, Dubbo for the Councils of this area to explain the changes. Due to a number of reasons Bourke Shire Council was unable to attend as were a number of other Councils in the area. Bourke Shire has arranged for StateCover to visit Bourke to run through the changes and Bourke Shire will be joined by Walgett, Brewarrina and Cobar Shires with a couple of other Councils still to confirm.

Council has accepted an invitation from Services New South Wales to provide a slightly increased range of services on their behalf. Councils adopted a recommendation from staff to accept that invitation with Council resolving at the meeting on 22nd June 2015 to provide services relating to Birth Deaths and Marriages in addition to some work for the Department of Fair Trading and the Seniors Card.

The introduction of the new services will take place over the next few months once staff have received the required training and any additional facilities installed.

Included in the proposal is the possible installation of a self-serve kiosk that will enable people without internet connection at home or work to be able to process transactions.

The concept of Service New South Wales has been rolled out by the State Government over the past few years and involves the ability for Services New South Wales Offices to be able to process payments and enquiries for a number of NSW government Departments and not just the RMS.

There a number of grant opportunities currently available and most of the grants are allocated on a competitive basis. If Councils are to be successful in their applications they should ensure that the applications lodged are of a high standard and meet all the appropriate guidelines.

Transport New South Wales conducted a seminar in Dubbo last week aimed at ensuring all Councils were aware of the criteria and guidelines for grant funds allocated by that Department and both Mark Gordon the Manager of Roads and I took the opportunity to attend. The course was beneficial and provided some important insights into ways submissions can be improved to maximise the chances of success. One of the concerns of all smaller Councils is the ability to be able to dedicate both the staff and financial resources to the wide range of applications. It is important that we focus on those grants which we feel have the best chance of success.

Like most businesses in Australia, Bourke Shire will be undertaking the end of year processing including the finalisation of the accounts for 2014/2015 and commencing the 2015/2016 Financial Year.

The end of year involves a considerable amount of additional work including the production of group certificates, finalising and acquitting grants, payment of creditors to reflect the correct year, calculation of depreciation and then culminating with the preparation of the Annual Financial Reports.

The wet weather has been certainly welcome in the far west of the state with a number of areas receiving very good falls of rain which would have been extremely welcome by landowners who have been struggling with drought conditions for an extended period.

The wet weather has also resulted in significant closures of the unsealed road network right across the far west as Councils took action to limit traffic on these roads in an effort to ensure that there was no damage to the road surfaces or significant damage caused by deep wheel marks. Generally the travelling public act responsibly but there a few who think it is okay to cause damage to roads and reserves and do not think of the work that goes into repairing the damage they cause and the significant costs incurred.

I have noticed that Sydney press have shown an increased focus and interest on the Local Government Reform Process with the prospect of amalgamations in the Sydney area being the focus of a number of newspaper articles.

It would appear that there has been some talks and possible agreement between some Councils in the metropolitan region relating to merger proposals.

The 144 Councils who had to submit "Fit for the Future" proposals had to do so by Tuesday, 30th June and the bulk of those will no doubt appear on the websites of the respective Councils.

The proposals will be assessed by IPART who have indicated that they will have their report completed in mid- October 2015.

Council has joined with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in increasing public awareness in relation to the need to cover loads of rubbish to Waste Management Facilities. There are penalties for failing to cover loads and the while this should in itself be a deterrent there should also be an understanding of the potential environmental damage that rubbish that is incorrectly disposed of can cause coupled with the impact it has on the appearance of the landscape.

The Legislative Council has asked the General Purpose Standing Committee No 6 to inquire into and report on local Government in New South Wales in relation to a number of aspects of the current Local Government Reform Process.

The committee will conduct a public hearing at Cobar on the 17th August 2015. Bourke Shire Council will be drafting a brief submission to the committee and forwarding it by the closing date which is this Sunday 5th July 2015.

Thought for the week!

“Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen”.

Winston Churchill

Ross Earl
General Manager