



“From the GM’s Desk” 9th July 2015



Mayor, Cr Andrew Lewis and Manager of Tourism and Development, Phil Johnston and I joined representatives from Coonamble, Brewarrina and Walgett Shire in Brewarrina to follow on the meeting with the Minister for Regional Development, the Hon. John Barilaro, MP regarding the impact both socially and economically of the extended drought conditions which have plagued our respective shires over the past three or four years.

The initial representations to Minister Barrilaro were coordinated by NSW Farmers who have been strong advocates for assistance to be provided to the impacted communities. Following the initial meeting the Minister requested additional details so that consideration of assistance could be further progressed.

The type of assistance is still being determined but will need to be available to both the business sector and the rural sector.

While recent rainfall has seen the lessening of those drought conditions the impact of three or four years of substantially reduced income is not overcome over-night.

One of the significant impacts of drought conditions is that many employees whose income is directly related to the strength of the rural economy are forced to travel elsewhere to find work and in many instances this move often becomes permanent. Bourke Shire faced this dilemma during the drought in the early 2000s and has yet to fully recover from that event.

The lack of water for irrigation has meant that cotton production has fallen significantly over the past four years. With the fall in production it has also meant a decrease in the number of employees required and a decrease in inputs to the local economy.

As detailed last week the work required to have the PV Jandra operational has been completed and the vessel is once again fully operational. The numbers on the boat have been good since it restarted operations and it is hoped that this increase in patronage will continue to make up for the numbers lost whilst repairs were being affected.

Thank you to all those who worked so hard to ensure that the downtime was minimised.

Whilst on the Jandra, it forms one of the major tourist attractions for Bourke and District as we strive to make Bourke a “Destination” as opposed to merely a stopover.

The Jandra, coupled with the Back O’ Bourke Exhibition Centre, Crossley Engine, Outback Show, Town Tours, Poetry on a Plate, good quality accommodation and caravan parks, good hospitality, friendly faces and great food at the local hotels, club and restaurants, art galleries, shopping

centre, Mount Oxley, the historical features of Bourke and its place in Australian folklore are combining to achieve that goal with the intent that the visitation period for each of our tourists will be extended and this will only serve to strengthen the contribution of tourism to the local economy.

If you have not previously visited any of the attractions in town or it has been some time since the last visit why not take the time to reacquaint yourself with what the town has to offer. Each resident has the opportunity to be an ambassador for the town and in doing so play their part in the promotion of the town.

Some of the recent comments received from tourists at the Back O' Bourke Exhibition Centre include:

- Great walk through history
- An awakening to Australia's existence
- Excellent

Nominations are now open for the Australian of the Year Awards. The awards are in four categories: Australian of the Year, Senior Australian of the Year (65 years and over), Young Australian of the Year (16 to 30 years) and Australia's Local Hero.

Further details can be obtained at Councils Offices. Nominations close on the 3rd August 2015.

Nominations are also being called for the "Hidden Treasures Honour Roll".

Hidden Treasures acknowledges the important volunteer roles women play within NSW Rural Communities. It is not an award but provides a platform to pay tribute to rural women volunteers who donate their time and energy to help others. Nominating a rural woman for the Hidden Treasure Roll is a great way to celebrate rural women from across New South Wales who give so much of their time to improving our communities and neighbourhoods.

Further details are available from Council offices or emailing rural.women@dpi.nsw.gov.au

Nominations close on 31st July 2015.

Council had submitted an application for funding under the Mobile Phone Service Black Spots Programme, however, were unfortunately unsuccessful. While extremely disappointed we will continue to lobby for improved services to our community in relation to mobile service and continue to highlight the fact that mobiles are an essential part of life and those without the service are at a significant disadvantage. The town of Wanaaring has no service at all which comes as a major surprise to many tourists who rely on the connection to the internet via mobile service for maps and information not to mention any emergency situations.

The villages of Louth, Enngonia and Byrock whilst having some mobile service it falls well short of community expectations and in some instance relies very much on exactly where you are standing and often fades in and out. The quality of the service to all sectors of our community was

mentioned in our submission. We are often told by our mobile service providers that 98% of the population is able to have mobile reception; however, percentage of the land mass that is adequately covered is almost the reverse, given the high density of population along the eastern seaboard in particular.

In great news Council received notification during the week that the Roads to Recovery Funding had been significantly increased for the next two years. Council's allocation over the past has been \$840,838 and it had previously been advised that amount would double for the 2015/2016 financial year.

However, earlier this week Councils across Australia were notified of a significant increase for 2015/2016 with Bourke Shire's allocation going to \$2,402,131 and the allocation for 2016/2017 being \$2,774,060 before returning to the normal allocation in 2017/2018.

Council will now identify projects which can be undertaken with the additional funding as it strives to improve the vast road network for which it is responsible. There are number of projects throughout the shire which have been possible from Roads to Recovery funding and its implementation has been a tremendous assistance to Council.

The Back Of Bourke Race Club has again been allocated Easter Sunday as their Race Day date for 2016. No doubt the allocation of the date reflects the hard work done by the committee in staging the 2015 meeting and the huge attendance on the day. The Race Day will be one of the features of the activities being discussed by the Back to Bourke Reunion Committee as they discuss the options for next year's activities.

It is good to see the increased usage of Renshaw Oval Complex and the cooperation shown amongst user groups. Hopefully, with a combination of resources, the successful lodgement of grant applications and the ongoing support of Council the transformation which has taken place at Renshaw Oval can continue.

I note that some local businesses have recently changed hands and would wish the new proprietors of the North Bourke Store, Denise, Sandi and Judi all the best for the new venture whilst Dan and Stephanie have recently taken over the Mitchell Caravan Park and again I wish them well with their new business. It is good to see the ongoing confidence in the town.

Remember shopping locally keeps employment local. If it is not on the shelf or on display ask if it can be ordered in!

Support the businesses that support the town!

Remember also whilst the utilisation of online payments may be convenient it can come at a cost of local jobs and the availability of local service. If there is an agency in town why not pay locally!

The Parliamentary Secretary for the Minister for the Environment will be in town next week and will be accompanied by our Local Member for Parkes Mark Coulton. Mr Baldwin will meet with members of Barwon Darling Water as well as Council where the discussion will heavily focus on the socio-economic impact of the water buybacks on the towns along the Barwon Darling system and in particular Bourke.

Thought for the week!

"Things do not happen. Things are made to happen." John F. Kennedy

Ross Earl
General Manager