



“From the GM’s Desk”

5th November 2015



Neil Andrew, the new Chair of the Murray Darling Basin Authority was in Bourke on Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday morning as part of a familiarisation Tour of the Murray Darling Basin Region. He also visited Brewarrina and Walgett during the trip.

Neil was accompanied by the Executive Officer of the Northern Basin Frank Walker, Geoff Wise from the Northern Basin Advisory Committee, Diana Gibbs a Board Member of MDBA and Rebecca Thornbury from the MDBA Staff.

He met with Community representatives from lunchtime on Tuesday and then hosted a dinner that night for invited guests representing various sectors of the community.

The group was hosted on a brief tour of the area by the Chairman of Barwon Darling Water, Tony Thompson and Executive Officer, Ian Cole. Both gentlemen had earlier given the group a presentation on the impact of water entitlement losses to the Bourke Community.

All available Councillors also met with the group over breakfast on Wednesday morning to raise issues that council has been advocating for some time now. Council understands the need to ensure that the impact the Murray Darling Basin Plan over the entire Murray Darling Basin area was considered but highlighted the particular impact on Bourke.

All locals were very impressed with the openness of the new Chairman and his genuine desire to ensure that the outcomes achieved are the best for all sectors of the Murray Darling Basin.

The Legislative Council’s Standing Committee on Social Issues is holding an inquiry into service coordination in communities with high social need in Bourke today. Council will have the opportunity to bring its concerns to the attention of the committee as will a number of other local organisations.

The committee has chartered a plane and will spend the whole day in Bourke and it is great to see the members of committees such as this visit the remote areas of the state to hear and see firsthand the issues impacting on service delivery and effectiveness.

Together with my colleagues from the other Councils in the Far West of the State whose Councils are subject to membership of the Far West Initiative, I took part in a teleconference hosted by the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Office of Local Government to detail the next steps available to those Councils who undertook the “Fit for the Future” process and the funding available to them should they elect to enter into a merger situation with one or more other Councils.

Annette and I travelled to Louth last Saturday to join those celebrating the sesqui- centenary of the town and I would like to acknowledge the work that was put in by the organisers. The history exhibition was very good and there was a considerable amount of memorabilia from the various parts of the town's history and organisations. The exhibition of the wedding dresses was a hit with the women and in particular the dress which was 140 years old and still in excellent condition.

Patsy Duncan who helped host the history display gave the proceeds of donations that they had received from people visiting the display to be added to the funds raised locally for Tour de OROC. These funds are to be allocated for the construction of Macquarie Home Stay which is accommodation to be built on the grounds of the new Dubbo Hospital for patients and families of patients, including those from the west of the state utilising Dubbo Hospital. It was a welcome surprise to receive the funds on behalf of this worthy organisation.

The Mayor, Cr Andrew Lewis and Manager of Tourism and Economic Development, Phil Johnston gave evidence to the Senate Select Committee on the Murray Darling Basin Plan at the inquiry held in Griffith on Tuesday. Both indicated that the trip was worth the effort and the Senators were genuinely interested in what they and the other Councils had to say.

The Mayor, Cr Andrew Lewis and I travelled to Lightning Ridge on Thursday, 29th October for the Meeting of Orana Regional Organisation Councils (OROC) on Friday. All members of OROC were in attendance and those present were able to hear presentations from the NSW Wales Department of Planning which focussed on the Regional Plans being developed, The Regional Manager of Essential Energy who detailed the impact of the Australian Energy Regulator and the financial impact on Essential Energy leading to the impact on both the levels of services and expenditure and the number of staff.

Jeff Caldbeck, Chief Executive Officer of the Central West Rural Financial Services was also in attendance and he outlined the changes that have been brought about by the changes to the Rural Counselling Service Australia wide including the calling for tenders for a new Northern Region which will include Bourke and Brewarrina and the fact that the reduction of funding will also mean a reduction in the number of counsellors to service the region.

This meeting also incorporated the Annual General Meeting of OROC and following the calling of nominations Cr Bill McAnnally, Mayor of Narromine was re-elected unopposed as Chairman with Bourke Mayor, Cr Andrew Lewis being re-elected as Vice-President and he will be joined by Cr Rex Wilson, Mayor of Warren Shire.

Another guest at the OROC meeting was Kevin Humphries who was able to update those present on a few issues, including the imminent release of the second round of the Murray Darling Structural Adjustment Funding. As expected Mr Humphries was also subject to a number of questions in relation to the outcomes of the IPART report in relation to their assessment of the various Council's "Fit for the Future Submission"

There were around 20 members of a touring Rotary motorcyclists group that visited on Monday and all seem to be impressed with Bourke and the hospitality shown. The group were hosted in Bourke for lunch at the Bourke Men's shed with the lunch to be supplied by Bourke Rotary Club. Mathew McCorkle a keen motorcyclist himself acted as a tour guide for the group's brief stopover and my thanks go to Mathew.

I attended the quarterly meeting of the Regional Leadership Group held in Dubbo on Tuesday, 3rd November. The group brings together the General Managers from Councils across the Region together with the Regional Managers of the various Government Departments. The main topic for consideration was the recently release State Government Priorities Paper.

The news that Bourke should have an air service operating once again next year has certainly been welcomed by the Bourke community and surrounding district. The ability of people to be able to fly in and out of town will have a significant positive impact on all sections of our community, particularly the ability to enhance tourist visitation. The return of the air service will mean that Bourke is only two to three hours from a population base of eleven million people.

Kevin Humphries the Member for Barwon was in Bourke yesterday to meet with various members of the community and Council had the opportunity to meet with Kevin to raise a number of issues.

It was certainly great news that there has been an upgrade of the mobile phone services to Louth and it has been something that the community of Louth, Council and the Member for Parkes, Mark Coulton have been lobbying for some time. Whilst the village of Louth now has adequate service several other sections of the shire have limited or no services and Council will continue to lobby hard in this regards as a mobile phone services should be available to at least all urban centres. As I have said previously whist mobile services is available to 98% of the population it really covers far less than 10% of the land mass.

The Bourke Business Group met on Wednesday evening to discuss upcoming Christmas promotions and the development of the abattoir project. Also on the Agenda was a discussion about summertime promotions and the proposal to upgrade the mainstreet.

Quote of the Week!

"The greatest pleasure in life is doing what people say you cannot do!"

Ross Earl
General Manager