



“From the GM’s Desk” 3rd March 2016



Annette and I hosted three (3) members of the visiting Rotary Group Study exchange team from Taiwan whilst Meredith and Tony Thompson hosted the other two (2) members at their farm.

The group arrived on Thursday and left on the Monday with the pick-up and drop off point being at Nevertire.

The Group Leader was Rotarian Shu-min Tsai whilst the other members of the group Jacky Kang, Catherlen Liu, Jing Hsieh and Peggy Chi were all members of Rotaract Clubs.

The group were a delight to host and it was a very busy weekend with a number of functions and visits to the various points of interest in and around Bourke. One of the highlights for the host families was the traditional Taiwanese meal that the group cooked on the Saturday night. Among the highlights for the group was seeing the wildlife, a river cruise courtesy of Bob and Melba Stutsel and the visit to the Nyngan Solar Farm. The 1.35 million solar panels that are located at the farm makes it currently the biggest solar farm in the southern hemisphere.

Given that Taiwan is roughly the same size as Bourke Shire Council and has a similar population to the whole of Australia meant the trip from Dubbo to Bourke was like travelling the length of Taiwan.

The group were extremely interested in what they saw and each had a tremendous sense of humour and quickly interacted with the people of Bourke.

It is the first time for some years since Bourke had the opportunity to host a group.

Annette and I will be attending the Annual Conference of Rotary District 9670 at Mudgee on the weekend and will again have the opportunity to catch up with the group.

The Community is reminded that due to the fact that the next two (2) scheduled meeting dates for the Ordinary Meeting of Council are public holidays for Easter Monday and Anzac Day that those meetings will be held on the 3rd Mondays of the Month being the 21st March and the 18th April.

The New Pre-School was officially opened by the Member for Barwon, Kevin Humphries, MP who joined with Mayor of Bourke Shire Council, Cr Andrew Lewis, Maxine Mackay and Pru Ritchie in conducting the opening.

A good crowd was in attendance and they heard an outline of the history of the Pre School which was presented by Maxine Mackay and was a testimony to the hard work and dedication of the committee members over a number of years.

While Kevin was in town the Mayor Andrew Lewis and I had the opportunity to catch up with him in relation to a number of issues impacting on Council at a State Government level. Included in the issues raised were, the local government reform process, the Far West Initiative, an update on the tender process for the provision of an air service for Bourke and the abattoir proposal.

Council on Tuesday received notification that its applications for two (2) projects under the restart NSW Water Security for Regions, Water and Wastewater Back Log Funding had been shortlisted.

The first project is the application for a new water treatment plant and associated sludge lagoons which is anticipated to cost in the vicinity of \$9 million dollars whilst the second project is for the development of an additional oxidation pond at the Bourke Sewage Treatment Works.

Each of the projects involves a grant of 50% of the cost with the balance of the funding to be met from Council reserves and loan funding. With the current Water Treatment Plant reaching the end of its economic life it is a timely opportunity to secure the funding and Council will now be required to provide detailed applications for both projects.

Mayor, Cr Andrew Lewis and I will be attending the meeting of the Orana Regional Organisation of Councils (OROC) on Friday which will also be attended by the President of Local Government New South Wales, Cr Keith Rhoades AFSM and LGNSW Board Member, Cr Greg Mathews of Dubbo who is the Regional/Rural Vice President.

The Mayor, Cr Andrew Lewis, Deputy Mayor, Cr Barry Hollman and I will also attend the Annual General Meeting of the Western Division Councils to be held at Lightning Ridge on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday.

Bourke Shire Council has a number of motions for the Conference including one which calls for the Murray Darling Basin Association to continue its efforts to have a Freshwater Research Station established in Bourke. A summary of the motions and the result on the debate of each will be included in next week's column.

There a number of interesting speakers for the Conference, however, it is unfortunate that due to Parliament sitting on the day there will be no state parliamentarians in attendance.

Council staff members assisted by visiting consultant Brian Tickle have been busy over the past month preparing the budget for 2016/2017 and given that the rate increase in General Fund has been capped at 1.88% and there has been a freeze on the level of the Financial Assistance Grants the task has been difficult given the increases in wages and other goods and services in most instance have far exceeded the 1.8% allowable rate increase. The Managers are constantly looking for efficiencies to ensure that we get the best value for money.

Despite the financial constraints it is hoped to be able to present a balanced budget to Council's Corporate Planning Committee which is to be held on Monday, 14th March 2016.

A number of the issues raised during the recent round of community consultative meetings were considered in the budget preparation and where possible included.

The process includes the setting of the Revenue Policy and Fees and Charges as well as the budgetary allocations which are all combined into what is termed the Operational Plan.

Once endorsed by Council the Draft Operational Plan will be put on public exhibition for a minimum of 28 days to allow it to be reviewed by members of the public. The public are allowed to make submissions in respect of any part of the Operational Plan and Council is required to consider each of these submissions prior to adopting the Operational Plan for 2016/2017. The adoption of the Operational Plan is at stage is scheduled for the May Meeting.

On Friday, 11th March there will be a teleconference involving all the members of the Far West Initiative and at this stage it will be also involve the participation of the Minister for Local Government, the. Hon Paul Toole MP.

Whilst the concept of the Far West Initiative has been around for a while now it is likely over the next few weeks that we will see some information relating to the models under consideration for the Far West Initiative.

The next meeting of the Far West Initiative Advisory Committee led by John Williams, is scheduled for the 6th April in Wentworth and again the Minister for Local Government has indicated that he will be attending.

Quote of the Week!

"The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched - they must be felt with the heart"- Helen Keller

Ross Earl
General Manager