



“From the GM’s Desk”

13th April 2017



The Deputy Ombudsman, Aboriginal Programmes, Danny Lester was in town earlier this week for a series of meetings. One of the meetings was to discuss the development of a Draft Strategy for Bourke Economic Inclusion and Prosperity aimed at increasing employment opportunities in Bourke and in particular increasing the level of employment opportunities within the Aboriginal community within the Shire.

A number of good suggestions were made at the meeting and Bourke Shire Council has committed to working with the Ombudsman’s Office and the local Aboriginal community to create the necessary opportunities and importantly ensure sustainability of any employment opportunities.

One simple suggestion was the introduction of an electronic jobs board to inform all members of the community both within Bourke and other parts of the state about the availability of jobs.

Additionally the fact that the way in which a number of contracts for government work were allocated makes it extremely difficult for the smaller locally based operators to compete. This is something that impacts on a number of smaller towns and is something that Bourke Shire Council would like to see addressed and has had discussions with the Department of Public Works on the issue.

The expansion of job opportunities in rural NSW is something that Bourke Shire has been advocating for some time and would assist with the drift of population to the eastern seaboard and in doing so perhaps assist in reducing the demand for housing in those areas.

One of the actions to be undertaken as a result of the meeting was the coordination of a meeting with the appropriate State Government Ministers in Sydney and progress has already been made in this regard.

I was in Sydney last week to attend the quarterly meeting of the StateCover Advisory Committee of which I am a member. StateCover is the Workers Compensation insurer for the vast majority of Councils across NSW. There are appointed representatives from across the State; however, I am the sole representative West of the Newell Highway. The Advisory Committee provides feedback to both the Management Team and Board of StateCover and looks at ways that StateCover can improve their service to their client Councils and provide guidance as how to both better manage claims that do occur and more importantly institute initiatives to prevent claims from occurring in the first instance.

While in Sydney I took the opportunity to visit the NSW Wales Audit Office and meet with David Nolan, Director Financial Audit Services who will be responsible for the conduct of the Audit of Bourke Shire Council, plus the majority of the members of OROC. Whilst the overall responsibility of

the Audit will be with the Auditor General they have appointed other firms to undertake much of the role on their behalf.

It was pleasing to hear that the intention is to make the transition of the audit function of Councils as seamless as possible and not to create additional work for the staff of those Councils.

As I have previously mentioned the Auditor General has appointed Hills Rogers who have been Council's Auditors for some time to undertake that role on behalf of the Auditor General and will be visiting Bourke in the first week of May.

During my Sydney visit I also met with various Officers of Local Government New South Wales (LGNSW) to discuss a range of issues including the introduction of the Fire and Emergency Services Levy and the Far West Initiative.

The Far West Initiative (FWI) is still being progressed with a meeting of Government Agencies being convened by the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Office of Local Government in Dubbo last week as a further part of the ongoing consultation phase. This meeting follows similar meetings held in both Sydney and Broken Hill.

Last Friday at a seminar conducted by Local Government Professionals in Sydney, the Acting Chief Executive Officer of the NSW Office of Local Government (OLG), Tim Hurst was one of the speakers and I understand that during his address he indicated that officers were proceeding with the development of the Far West Initiative concept.

The Fire and Emergency Services Levy (FESL) has passed through Parliament and has received Royal Assent and will come into operation on the 1st July 2017.

The FESL legislation requires all properties to be categorised and the owners of the land to be notified of that classification. The FESL contributions in 2017-2018 will be based on the budget of the emergencies services agencies for the year, the land classification and the unimproved land value on the 1st July 2016. It is anticipated that FESL rates will be published by the end of April each year and will be available at fesl.nsw.gov.au

It has been estimated that insurance premiums on residential properties will drop by up to 20% with commercial properties anticipated to drop by up to 30%.

As previously highlighted the FESL will be collected on behalf of the state Government and IS NOT RETAINED BY COUNCIL. Council is merely acting as an agent of the State Government.

Eligible pensioners who receive a rebate on land rates will receive a \$50.00 concession which will apply to the FESL.

All Councils are required to provide information to landowners over the next few weeks and this includes how to raise queries in relation to land classification. Some properties which are "non-rateable" will be subject to the levy but will benefit from the anticipated lower insurance premium.

One of the major issues for Councils has been the adoption of a single base date for the determination of Land Value across the State whereas previously the base dates had varied. This has meant a considerable amount of work for both the Valuer General and the individual Councils.

The Executive of the Western Division Councils have convened a workshop in Broken Hill on the 6th May 2017 to develop a Strategic Plan for the organisation.

The need for a Strategic Plan was identified at the meeting of the Executive last month and will be a facilitated workshop with external resources being engaged to assist Councils in getting the right outcome.

There have been significant changes to the operation of Local Government in NSW over the past few years and in many instances this has meant a change of focus and it is important the Strategic Plan reflects the contemporary needs of all members and sets the future direction for the organisation. The Western Division was an extremely powerful lobby group in the past and it is important that the structures are put in place so that the concerns of the people in the west of the state are articulated to the higher tiers of government.

A reminder that while Council has reverted back to the 4th Monday for the conduct of its normal monthly meetings. The April meeting has been previously changed to Wednesday, 26th April 2017 commencing at 9.00am.

All seems to be in readiness for this year's Easter Celebrations which will once again lead off on Friday morning with the Mud Run which proved so popular in its inaugural year last year with the Long Table Dinner to follow on the Friday Night. Saturday will see the parade and wool bale rolling in the morning and the Rugby Union in the afternoon. Sunday will commence with an ecumenical Church Service at the Wharf followed by the Back O Bourke Race Club's Annual Meeting which will no doubt once again see a good crowd in attendance.

Mayor Hollman is generally available between **2.00pm to 3.00pm** of a Monday at the Council Chambers to discuss any issues with residents, except the 4th Monday of each Month which of course is Council Meeting Day. He will be available on 24th April 2017. He is also available by appointment by contacting Kai Howard-Oakman, Executive Assistant at Council's Offices.

Quote of the Week!

"Opportunities are usually disguised as hard work so most people don't recognise them"

- Ann Landers

Ross Earl
General Manager