



“From the GM’s Desk”

8th June 2017



Mayor Barry Hollman and I attended the quarterly meeting of Orana Regional Organisation of Councils (OROC) last Friday along with the Mayors and General Managers of all other member Councils.

The Board of OROC was honoured that the Premier of New South Wales, the Hon. Gladys Berejiklian, MP agreed to join them for lunch with the Premier providing the opportunity for each of the Mayors to raise issues of concern with her in an informal manner. The Premier was very approachable, willing to listen and taking a very genuine interest in all the issues raised.

Mayor Barry Hollman took the opportunity to invite the Premier to visit Bourke and will follow up on that verbal invitation with a more formal invitation this week.

The meeting of OROC was held at Western Plains Zoo with the lunch being held at the Zoofari Restaurant at the Zoo with the meal having a very strong African influence with a number of their traditional meals and condiments forming part of the menu. The meal included both crocodile and camel which was certainly a first for many of the guests including both the Mayor and myself.

Included on the agenda at the OROC Meeting was an address by the NSW Regional Infrastructure Coordination Team of Ken Gillespie and Don Murray who had also joined the OROC Board for Dinner the previous night. The team have been tasked by the Premier to review the delivery of State Government Infrastructure projects within the State. Ken and Don have visited many communities across the state and Bourke and Brewarrina Councils have invited the team to visit our respective communities. The area of the shires and low population base presents particular difficulties for all Councils in western New South Wales and in particular, to ensure that the infrastructure in some of the smaller communities is maintained and upgraded. The provision of amenities such as halls, ovals and water supplies are an essential part of the social fabric of these towns and villages and would have extremely difficult in alternating funding if Cost Benefit Ratios (CBR’s) were applied to funding assessments as they are for some other funding opportunities.

A good news story for Bourke is the success of the Learner Driver Program which has been undertaken by Orange based training organisation “Birrang” in association with Bourke based Maranguka. The program has been going for some time and has had excellent success over the past three (3) years in particular. Indicative of that success was the fact that during the past five (5) week block of training delivery there has been 15 people obtain their P1 license, 1 gaining their P2 and a further 21 obtaining their learner’s permit. There are also another seven (7) drivers already booked in for the P1 test during the next visit by the RMS licencing officer, who has been kept quite busy with the numbers of people going for their licence. Given the distances involved out in the west of the state the holding of a licence is almost a necessity. The program delivered by Birrang has apparently also resulted in a dramatic decrease in the number of people being charged for offences

related to driving whilst unlicensed. The obtaining of a licence has a very positive impact when seeking employment. Well done to instructor Lyndall Robb and the team.

News that the introduction of the proposed Fire and Emergency Services Levy (FESL) was going to be deferred indefinitely took Bourke Shire staff by surprise and no doubt took many other Councils' in the state by similar surprise. A lot of work had gone into the project including the classification of land and the notification of that classification to the individual landowners. Council had to have our software providers make adjustments to our existing programmes to accommodate the change for our rate notices and as late as a few days before the announcement staff were working out details as to how best handle the transactions within the ledger system.

While the concept of ensuring that everyone paid for their share of the the cost of emergency services met with widespread support the inclusion of the levy on the rate notices had the potential to cause some issues for Councils with many people of the view that it was going to be another Council charge.

Bourke Shire Council, like all other Councils had reached an agreement with Treasury that all the costs incurred in the implementation of the FESL would be reimbursed by Treasury and Council would be collating details for an invoice for the actual costs incurred prior to the deferral and forwarding it to Treasury over the next few weeks and I am confident that all our costs will be met in full.

Councillors and Staff had the opportunity to meet with the Chief Executive Officer of Rural and Remote Medical Services (RaMS), Shane Hatton and the Regional Practice Manager, Michelle Powell last Wednesday to discuss with RaMS their ongoing operations in Bourke. A number of issues were raised including the ongoing provision of pathology services in Bourke, the provision of Allied Health Services and ongoing difficulties being experienced in recruiting and retaining staff in all health related professions in to rural and remote areas of New South Wales. Council has a strong interest in health services recognising its importance to the community and appreciated the briefing provided. Council will continue to advocate for the retention and ongoing improvement to medical services with the Shire.

Following the request to Western Health District to provide information on the number of births to Bourke based women following the closure the Birthing Unit at Bourke Hospital I have been advised that Joy Adams, Nursing and Midwifery Manager for the District will visit Bourke shortly to present the information. The prompt response and preparedness of Western Health District to provide the update is very much appreciated.

Yesterday, Mayor Barry Hollman, Councillor Victor Bartley, Manager of Corporate Services, Leonie Brown joined with Alistair Ferguson representing Maranguka and the Bourke Aboriginal Working Party in meeting with John Barilaro, MP, Deputy Premier, Minister for Regional New South Wales, Minister for Skills and Minister for Small Business, the Hon. Victor Dominello, MP, Minister for Finance, Services and Property, the Hon, Sarah Mitchell, MP, Minister for Early Childhood Education, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Assistant Minister for Education in relation to the proposed *Bourke Aboriginal Employment Prosperity Strategy* aimed at improving employment

opportunities within Bourke. Also in attendance at the meeting were local business owner Darren Jackson and James Price who represented CAPRA Pty Ltd the owners of the New Abattoir at North Bourke. The meeting was facilitated by Danny Lester, Deputy Ombudsman and also included a number of senior Public Servants.

I am confident that with a commitment and cooperation from all parties that the opportunity exists for some significant and positive outcomes in relation to the provision of employment opportunities in Bourke.

Whilst in Sydney, Councillors and staff took the opportunity to meet with staff at Local Government New South Wales with whom we deal with on a regular basis and in many instances do not often get the opportunity to meet personally.

One of the areas to be considered as part of the Local Government reform process was the proposed establishment of Joint Organisation of Councils (JOs). There has been considerable discussion and speculation as to the proposed format that these will take if in fact they are introduced with details still to be announced. Apparently at a meeting of the CENTROC Councils held at Parliament House in Sydney two (2) weeks ago, a two (2) week timeframe was mentioned for the announcement which should make the announcement imminent. The Boundaries initially proposed for Joint Organisations were very similar to the existing boundaries of the Regional Organisation of Councils (ROCs); however, we will have to see what has been finally determined.

There has been no new information received in relation to the concept of the Far West Initiative (FWI) nor has there been any feedback to Councils or the community regarding the outcome of the extensive consultation process that was undertaken last in 2016. The eight (8) Councils involved are also awaiting feedback from the work done by T-Corp regarding the sustainability assessment or the review by consulting firm Morrison Low regarding the assessment of Councils assets and their condition. Some of this work was undertaken six (6) months ago.

Quote of the Week!

"Don't complain about things you are not willing to change"

Ross Earl
General Manager