



“From the GM’s Desk”

8th March 2018



Mayor Barry Hollman, Councillor Victor Bartley and I travelled to Balranald last week to attend the Western Division of Councils Annual Conference and found the Conference to be quite beneficial with a number of very interesting speakers. Included on the agenda were the newly elected President of Local Government New South Wales (LGNSW) Linda Scott and the Chief Executive of LGNSW, Donna Rygate and Melissa Gibbs from the Office of Local Government all of whom provided an update on issues within Local Government.

Other speakers included the Shadow Minister for Local Government, the Hon. Peter Primrose, MLC and Dean Lynch who had an update on Snowy Hydro 2. I note that the Federal Government has this week agreed to buy the New South Wales Government’s share in the Snowy Mountains Scheme.

Our trip to Balranald took us through Hillston and Hay and were all amazed at the level of farmland redevelopment that has been undertaken in the area. There were many large irrigation projects either having been installed or in the process of being installed.

As part of the social program on the Sunday afternoon delegates were given the opportunity to visit a developing almond farm which is being completed at a cost of around 80 million dollars. The farm currently has around 300,000 trees planted and will have 550,000 when it is fully developed. It is quite an amazing undertaking and it is utilising state of the art technology.

Bourke Shire Council had 12 motions of the 23 motions that were put before the conference and each of the motions received the support of the Conference.

The motions dealt with a range of issues impacting on Bourke Shire and they will now be forwarded to Local Government New South Wales for inclusion in the Business Paper for consideration at the Annual Conference of that organisation.

Bourke Shire Council will host the 2019 Western Division Councils Annual Conference in either late February or early March. Preliminary work has begun in preparation for the event with a number of sponsors already indicating that they again want to be part of the conference. This is tremendous given that the announcement to host the conference was only made on the last day of the conference.

Whilst there is a little bit of work involved in the coordination of the conference it does provide the opportunity to showcase our town plus allows the opportunity for local Councillors and staff to attend. The conference in the past attracted over 100 delegates.

The Welcome to Bourke function held at the Bourke War Memorial Swimming Pool Complex last Wednesday night went well despite the number of new residents attending being down on last year. Those who did attend were entertained by Andy and Fiona Garland and daughter Molly. The "Bourke Boot Scooters" Line Dancing Group and the Bourke Choir. A number of local organisations took the opportunity to attend and detailed to the new residents the range of activities both social and sporting that were available in Bourke.

Member for Barwon Kevin Humphries, MP and wife Lindy together with a member of Kevin's staff, Carla Campbell, were in town last week and undertook a number of duties including the presentation of a letter of offer for a grant of \$114,000.00 to go towards the development of the Back O' Bourke Centre which is very much appreciated.

The funds will be utilised to provide a new display at the Back O' Bourke Exhibition Centre. The proposed new display "Dreaming Tracks - A celebration of Aboriginal Culture" will recognise the history and culture of Aboriginal people in the Bourke Region.

Kevin also convened a meeting with representatives of TAFE New South Wales to discuss the concept of the Connected Learning Centres which will be the type of building to be constructed at the current Bourke Campus to replace the current facilities from a TAFE point of view. The meeting also provided the opportunity for local organisations to detail plans for potential use of buildings and land that may become surplus to the needs of TAFE once the new building is constructed. It is anticipated that the new building will be constructed during 2018 and ready to use in 2019.

Kevin and his party accompanied Manager of Corporate Services, Leonie Brown and I on a tour of the new Abattoir Complex and were extremely impressed with the progress which had been made to date.

Kevin has been a strong advocate for Bourke Shire over the past few years and Council looks forward to a continuation of his support for the balance of his parliamentary term.

At the risk of sounding like a "stuck record" or these days that should probably be "an iPod on repeat" I would ask all residents to try to ensure both their properties and nature strips are neat and tidy for the Easter Weekend. The weekend once again promises to be well attended and with two (2) large reunions also planned for the weekend it would be good to see the town presented to its best advantage.

With the current water restrictions in place it may be difficult to ensure that everything is as green as we would like but this can be offset to a large degree by a neat and tidy presentation.

As I write this column the level in the Bourke Weir Pool has dropped to 3.36 which means it is dropping at a rate of over a centimetre per day and unless there is an inflow there is the possibility that we could be on level 3 restrictions in early April.

There is the strong possibility of some water reaching Bourke following a rain event in the catchment last week with good flows in the upper reaches of the river. Whether those flows will reach Bourke is still to be determined. Council staff are monitoring the website which gives the indication of flows and hopefully the ability of the flow to reach Bourke will become a little more apparent over the next few days.

The rain on Sunday was very timely and no doubt welcomed by the gardeners within town who have struggled to keep all their plants healthy due to the combination of the heat and water restrictions.

Work is continuing on trying to arrange for an environmental flow to be made available with Bourke Shire Council supported by Walgett, Central Darling Shires and Brewarrina having coordinated meetings with the Environmental Water Holders Office and then the Minister for Regional Water in New South Wales, the Hon. Niall Blair over the past couple of weeks.

There is, in my view, a strong willingness on behalf of all parties to make the flow happen.

During our Meeting with the Hon Niall Blair, Minister Blair indicated that the Council's representations were timely as the Government's Water Reform Action Group, an interagency working group, has been established and has been tasked with developing interim solutions to improve the management of environmental water within 90 days of the group commencing.

As part of this, the Water Reform Action Group has produced an Options Paper and Exposure Bill to be released in the week beginning the 12th March. Minister Blair said that there will be opportunities for community and stakeholder feedback on the proposed options during the consultation period with a series of meetings in regard to the options to be held. One of these meetings is to be held in Bourke shortly after the release of the Options Paper and Exposure Bill.

There is the possibility of a small inflow into the Bourke Weir Pool which, if received, is unlikely to result in water going over the weir itself, however, will increase the level in the weir.

This flow will not mean that work to secure an environmental flow will cease as it is extremely important to all residents along the river system that we continue to lobby for the environmental flow to be made available as quickly as possible. The people to the south of Bourke are concerned about the prolonged lack of flow.

The National Association for Loss and Grief (NALAG) will be hosting an exhibition of photos "Through Our Eyes" by locals from Bourke taken in conjunction with NALAG's recent Photographic Story Telling Work Shop. The Opening is scheduled for 10.30 starts with the opening at 11.00 am on Tuesday 27th March 2018 with light refreshments to be served. The venue will be the Bourke Men's Shed.

In what will be a somewhat of a first for Bourke Public Library the Library will be hosting three (3) authors on Monday, 26th March 2018 and it will provide the opportunity for Bourke Residents to meet with the authors and discuss with them their books and motivation for writing those books.

The authors who will be coming will be Jen Cowley who wrote "Grandpa's Hat", and Donna Falconer, whose book "My Time: Through Breast Cancer and Beyond: was also written with Jen's help, Toni Grant who wrote "Serpent Song".

Interestingly all three (3) authors have donated proceeds from the sales of the books to Charitable Organisations, with all proceeds from Jen's book "Grandpa's Hat" going to NALAG, all proceeds from Donna's book being donated to the McGrath Foundation and Breast Cancer Network Australia Network and funds from Toni's book going to assist in raising funds to assist in research into Breast Cancer.

All the authors are based in Dubbo and it is good to have these talented people come to Bourke.

Grandpa's Hat was illustrated by Archibald Prize Art finalist, Mark Horton who is also based in Dubbo and is the Regional Manager for the New South Wales Office of Sport.

Each of the authors will have copies of their book for sale and would no doubt be happy to sign any copies.

Further details in relation to the visit will be contained closer to the date.

Quote of the week!

"Challenges are what make life interesting and overcoming them is what makes life meaningful."
Joshua J. Marine

Ross Earl
General Manager