



“From the GM’s Desk”

10th May 2018



The Department of Premier and Cabinet is coordinating a small group representing various Government Agencies and Council to ensure that there is an increased awareness by all these agencies of the progress of the abattoir. As we move towards the operational date and more importantly, ensure that there is an adequate level of preparedness by all agencies.

It is anticipated that a number of people will be moving to Bourke in various capacities as a result of the employment opportunities at the abattoir, this will potentially lead to increased enrolments at schools and increased demand for things such as health services.

The meetings are to be held at Bourke Shire with the opportunity for representatives to “dial-In” to the meetings if located elsewhere. I will be representing Bourke Shire on the group and already there has been some positive initiatives put in place as a result of the initial meeting.

Residents are asked to ensure that their garbage bins are in good condition complete with lids so that they are not subject to attack by animals and birds which often results in rubbish left strewn over the footpath and someone with the not so pleasant task of cleaning it up. Equally important is to ensure that the lid on the bin is able to be closed so as to stop a similar occurrence.

Local Government New South Wales will be conducting a number of Regional Summits over the course of the year. Prior to the amalgamation of the Local Government and Shires Association to form Local Government New South Wales, these meetings were called Divisional Meetings and saw each division elect a representative to the Board of the Shires Association.

These summits will provide members with the opportunity to raise issues important to them and their local communities with the President, Board Members and Staff of LGNSW.

The summits will also provide the opportunity for Councils to discuss and share initiatives and experiences with neighbouring Councils within their region.

The nearest venue to Bourke will be Cobar on the 3rd July 2018 whilst there will be another held at Narromine on the 18th October 2018.

Work has commenced on the coordination of the Annual Conference of the Western Division Conference to be held in Bourke in February 2019. Following discussions with the President of Western Division, Dave Gallagher of Broken Hill the date has tentatively been set for 24th, 25th and 26th February 2019 which is approximately one month prior to the State Election.

Some sponsorship has already been secured and there has been a great deal of interest shown in the conference which we hope to make very relevant to contemporary Local Government issues and concerns with appropriate speakers to be secured.

With Charles Liggett, Manager of Tourism and Economic Development finishing up last week there will be the need to have a degree of continuity in this role.

I will be assuming temporary responsibility of the Tourism function, including the Back O' Bourke Exhibition Centre, Tourist Information Office and Jandra whilst the Manager of Corporate Services, Leonie Brown will be assuming the Economic Development functions. The Community/Social aspects of the role will be shared for the time being amongst staff.

Council has endorsed a proposal that the role will be separated going forward and the Organisational Structure be amended accordingly. Council will have a Manager of Tourism and a Manager of Economic Development. Position descriptions are currently being finalised with the position titles possibly to be amended to reflect the revised roles. It is anticipated that the recruitment for the roles will commence next week.

Council Auditors will be in Bourke to undertake the Mid-Year Audit and are expected to be in town for four (4) days, however, this will see them also visit our neighbours at Brewarrina with the audits as far as possible being coordinated to provide costs savings for each Council in relation to travel.

The Audit Office of New South Wales is now responsible for all Local Government Audits and the ultimate signatory for all reports. Our Auditors Hills Rogers from Sydney work effectively as a sub contractor to the Auditor General. The Audit Office have made some amendments to the way in which the audit is undertaken and has broadened the scope of the Audit to bring it into line to the way in which it audits each of the State Government Agencies.

The first audit under the auspice of the Auditor General was in 2016/2017 and there were a few teething issues across all Councils, however, as the new requirements are bedded down the process is expected to be a little smoother in 2017/2018.

Council staff and Consultant, Belinda Colless worked together to prepare Council's submission for funding under the Stronger Country Communities Fund. A lot of work goes into the preparation of the submissions and hopefully it will result in funding for improved facilities across the Shire.

The applications lodged reflected in the main the priorities determined via the Community Strategic Plan process together with the priorities set in the Workshop facilitated by Mark Horton from the Office of Sport - Western Region which identified the strengths weaknesses opportunities and threats for the success of sporting organisations in Bourke. Part of the

outcomes from the process was the identification of sporting infrastructure priority requirements with the upgrade of the pool. Improvements to both Coolican and Davidson Ovals and the facilities within Central Park and all of these featured strongly in the grant applications.

The Hon. Adam Marshall, MP Minister for Tourism and Major Events, and Assistant Minister for Skills will accompany our Local Member Kevin Humphries on a visit to Bourke on the 28th and 29th May 2018 and will be visiting in his capacity as both the Minister for Tourism and Assistant Minister for Skills.

His role as Minister for Tourism will see him discuss the opportunities for cross border tourism promotion opportunities with Bourke, Walgett, Brewarrina and Cobar Shires looking the opportunity to work with Balonne Shire based in St. George, Paroo Shire based in Cunnamulla and Bulloo Shire based in Thargomindah on the Queensland side of the border. Many tourists want to experience the great outback and are not constrained by state borders and if promotional opportunities can be undertaken to cover the region as a whole, all of these outback towns will benefit enormously.

As the Assistant Minister for Skills he will also be looking at the current TAFE Site with plans to construct a Connected Learning Centre currently being developed.

Mayor, Councillor Barry Hollman and I will be travelling to Sydney next week and we have a series of meetings scheduled on both Tuesday afternoon and on Wednesday before flying back to Dubbo that evening.

We have meetings with the Deputy Premier of New South Wales, the Hon. John Barilaro, MP as well as a meeting with our Local Member, Kevin Humphries.

We will also be meeting with representatives of the NSW Public Works in relation to the construction of the new Water Treatment Plant for Bourke and will take the opportunity to catch up with staff at Local Government New South Wales.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics has published their latest Population Estimates in their report number 3218 which show the population of Bourke Shire in 2017 being 2720 which is a drop of 2.4% or 67 people from the estimated population in 2016 of 2787.

The drop in population seems to reflect the overall trend in rural New South Wales with most of our close neighbours experiencing similar and even greater losses.

The ongoing drop in population is worrying as it is often used to assist in the need for services and as a component for the calculation of funding formulas. Council receives a number of grants which are based on a per capita basis and the loss in population can be reflected in these grants.

While the current figures show a decrease, I anticipate that this trend will be reversed in 2018 and show a significant increase in 2019 when the Abattoir is in full operation.

On a general basis it is alarming to see the ongoing loss of population in many rural areas and the drift to the eastern seaboard. The increase in population along the eastern seaboard places additional strain and demand on the available resources in those areas with the established infrastructure in rural New South Wales underutilised. There is a strong growth in a number of regional centres which of course reflects the trend to regionalisation of services.

The current State Government has invested heavily in Rural New South Wales and this funding is welcomed. In years gone by successive State Governments had a Department of Decentralisation to encourage economic development in rural New South Wales. I think an increased emphasis on regional development is essential if we are to see the services and facilities retained in the bush.

The new age of communication effectively means you can in most instances do business no matter where you are located.

The current flow in the river at Bourke continues to hover around the 3.98 metre mark; however the flow has reduced over the past week or so and is now to less than 40 megalitres per day. There is a small flow still from Brewarrina and it is hoped that this may be enough to negate the need for any consideration of water restrictions.

In good news, the good flow from the Culgoa which passed through Bourke just prior to Easter did reach Wilcannia and resulted in their weir pool being filled. The environmental flow will now have the benefit of a wet river as far as Wilcannia and this augers well for the opportunity for the water to traverse a much greater length of the river.

The environmental flow should reach Bourke in late May and Wilcannia about a month later.

In her weekly newsletter to all member Councils the President of Local New South Wales, Linda Scott reports that at the last meeting of the Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG), the members of the Group unanimously endorsed a recommendation from Local Government New South Wales that TCorp loans should be available to all Councils based on standard credit criteria rather than Fit for the Future status. This recommendation will now formally go forward to the NSW Government for consideration. The access to TCorp borrowing facilities would be welcomed by all Councils in the West of the State who did not participate in the Fit for the Future Process and at this stage seem to be ineligible to access the attractive rates offered by TCorp.

The NSW Department of Planning and Environment is seeking to appoint a Western Region Commissioner and has called application for the role.

The position which requires someone who is based in Western NSW and who can be a representative or kind of “ambassador” for the Western part of the State and will assist in the implementation the Department’s published plans specific to Western NSW. The role will also advise the Minister on important rural planning matters.

Rate Instalment Notices and Water Charge Notices went out this last week and the next instalment is due on the 31st May 2018.

In recent comparative data released in relation to all Councils following the Auditors General’s Report to Parliament in relation to benchmarks reached by individual Councils it showed that Bourke Shire had one of the highest levels of outstanding rates in New South Wales. Council is attempting to bring the level of outstanding rates below the benchmark of a maximum of 10% and will be looking at both increasing legal action to recover outstanding amounts and the conduct of a sale of land for unpaid rates in accordance with section 713 of the Local Government Act.

If you are having trouble meeting your obligations in respect to the payment of rates and charges please contact Councils Revenue Officer to see if a mutually acceptable payment plan can be put in place prior to legal action having to be institute and further costs incurred.

Quote of the week!

“The way get started is to quit talking and begin doing.”

Walt Disney

Ross Earl
General Manager