



“From the GM’s Desk”

24th May 2018



As foreshadowed in last week’s column the Mayor, Councillor Barry Hollman and I, along with the Mayors, of Walgett, Brewarrina, Balranald, Wentworth, Cobar Shires and Broken Hill City Council, the Administrator of Central Darling Shire and the General Managers of each Council attended a meeting at Parliament House on Wednesday, 16th May 2018 hosted by the Deputy Premier, the Hon, John Barilaro, MP.

The meeting focussed on plans for the Far West of the State following the decision not to proceed with the Far West Initiative. The two (2) local Members whose electorates cover the footprint of those Councils, Kevin Humphries, MP the Member for Barwon and Austin Evans, MP the Member for Murray and the Parliamentary Secretary for Western New South Wales, the Hon. Rick Colless, MLC were also in attendance.

The President of Local Government New South Wales, Linda Scott and Chief Executive, Donna Rygate also attended.

The Deputy Premier invited Steve Orr from the Department of Premier and Cabinet to provide details of the plan which effectively involves the proposed formation of two (2) JOs involving the eight (8) Councils previously identified for participation in the Far West Initiative.

Balranald, Broken Hill, Central Darling and Wentworth had previously indicated that they would be prepared to form a JO and the proposal is that the remaining four (4) Councils would also form a JO basically creating a North and South JO in the Far West.

One of the concerns for all Councils in relation to the formation of JOs has been the ongoing administration costs. To assist Councils in the Far West in this regard the following assistance package was detailed.

The proposed funding package includes:-

- \$250,000 to each Joint Organisation to update existing western road plans in their region;
- \$500,000 to each Joint Organisation to employ an Executive Officer and any support staff required;
- \$250,000 to each Joint Organisation towards planning support with NSW Public Works;
- \$5 million to each Joint Organisation to invest in Tourism and Culture Infrastructure projects to grow the visitor economy; and
- Funding to re-establish Far West Air Services to Cobar, Bourke and Lightning Ridge or Walgett with the opportunity to upgrade airport facilities in both the north and south.

Mr Barilaro said four (4) of the Far West Councils have already committed to a JO in the south and he encouraged the remaining Councils to consider the opportunity for a JO in the north.

There were a number of questions raised by Councils and these were answered either by the Parliamentary representatives in attendance or the representatives of the various Government Departments who were also in attendance.

The Councils have until the end of May to indicate their decision to be part of the JO process or otherwise. All Councils will need to meet either this week or early next week as a resolution of Council is required to formalise the way forward.

One of the components of the package being offered to Councils is the funding to re-establish an airline service to Bourke Walgett and Cobar. Bourke and Walgett have been without an air service since 2008 whilst Cobar lost their service late last year.

Bourke and Walgett Shires have been working closely with Local Member, Kevin Humphries, MP to try and re-establish an air service to their towns for the past five (5) years and there has previously been one (1) tender process take place, but this was unsuccessful in securing an operator.

The current proposal will see additional funding provided by the NSW Government to make the proposition much more attractive to potential operators particularly in the start-up phase.

The level of funding is obviously commercial in confidence; however, indications are that it is significantly higher than the amounts previously offered which should be sufficient to create renewed interest.

The lack of an air service has been identified as an issue in the Bourke Community Strategic Plan, also an impediment to the attraction, retention of staff and the ability to attract professional services on a short term basis.

Bourke Shire Council will consider the proposal to be part of the "North Far West" JO along with Cobar, Walgett and Brewarrina at its meeting to be held on Monday, 28th May 2018. Prior to that meeting a workshop was convened so that any queries in relation to the proposal can be raised and answers obtained. To that end Laura Clark the Deputy Chief of Staff for the Deputy Premier and Chris Presland from the Office of Local Government made themselves available to participate in the workshop via teleconference.

When flying back from Sydney last week we were almost preparing to land at Dubbo when the Captain indicated that there was a minor fault with the plane and that it would be returning to Sydney. Once in Sydney we disembarked and went back to the terminal and then boarded a replacement aircraft and were back in the air to complete our trip.

Whilst it meant we got back to Dubbo a couple of hours later than originally planned there was no angst shown from the passengers who all took it in their stride and accepted that it was just one of those things. I am sure it was better to err on the side of caution.

The crew on the plane were very professional at all times and were equally as accepting of the situation.

I will be attending the meeting of the Orana Regional Organisation of Councils (OROC) General Managers Advisory Committee (GMAC) on Thursday, 24th May 2018. The meeting will be hosted for

the first time by Mid-Western Regional Council in Mudgee. One of the items to be discussed will be the future of OROC. Some Councils have already committed to being part of a JO with the four (4) Far Western Councils recently being offered the opportunity to form their own JO. They will be provided with some financial assistance should they choose to go down that path.

There are other Councils that indicated that they do not wish to be part of a JO and strongly support the retention of OROC. No doubt discussion will revolve around the practicality of the two (2) organisations operating in tandem.

I think there is a general consensus that OROC has been a very effective organisation both as an advocacy group and also assisting in delivering significant savings to its members through a number of initiatives including the joint procurement of electricity.

As the current chair of GMAC, I feel that should the JO go ahead that at a minimum, OROC should continue to function for a least another six (6) to 12 months until the roles of the JOs are fully determined and bedded down and the future role of OROC can be more accurately determined.

Toni Grant from Dubbo who along with fellow Dubbo authors Jen Cowley and Donna Falconer visited Bourke early this year to talk about her book "Serpent Song" has just released another in the series called "Serpent Sting". Toni has given the Bourke Public Library a copy of her new book which is available for borrowing and has also indicated that she would again like to visit Bourke to provide a little detail in relation to her latest book.

There has been excellent response to the invitation issued to both Far North West New South Wales and South West Queensland Councils to attend a meeting in relation to the development of a Cross Border Strategy for Tourism Promotion and how that strategy can be best progressed.

At this stage Walgett, Cobar and Brewarrina from the NSW side and Paroo, Bulloo and Balonne Shire from the Queensland side have indicated that they will all be in attendance.

The fact that the NSW Minister for Tourism, the Hon. Adam Marshall, MP will be in attendance, certainly increases the importance of the meeting and he is a very strong advocate for Regional Tourism.

Minister Marshall will also be accompanied by representatives of Destination Regional and Outback New South Wales.

Our Local Member, Kevin Humphries has been instrumental in the coordination of the visit by Minister Marshall and it is hoped that this support will continue as the strategy is fully developed.

Regional Development Australia (RDA) Orana has developed a series of five (5) short videos aimed at creating an awareness of the advantages of living and working in the Orana Region. One (1) of the videos is specifically aimed at Bourke and features a number of local residents detailing the advantages as they see them and the residents range from longer term residents to newly arrived residents.

The videos will be able to be used to assist in attracting staff and are a positive step forward in promotion of this part of the state.

The launch of the videos is to take place this Tuesday and there will be a "Mini-Launch" in Bourke over the next month. Bourke Shire appreciates the support of RDA Orana and looks forward to working with them over the next 12 months to further develop business and employment opportunities within our shire area.

The Environmental Flow which has been termed the Northern Connectivity Event reached Brewarrina late last week and should reach Bourke during the latter part of this week, beginning 21st May 2018. It will then take about another week to reach Louth and a further week to reach Tilpa.

The flow should be in Wilcannia towards the end of June.

The flow has been welcomed by all those long the river system. As the drought continues to bite many people are saying it is as bad as they can remember and those fortunate enough to be adjacent to the river now having some surety over water supply at least in the short term

The Environmental Water Flow which has been the result of a great deal of work by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holders Office, The NSW Department of Environment and Heritage and NSW Office of Water.

The provision of the flow was supported by Local Government Councils along the river system who saw the dire situation that the river was experiencing and the environmental damage that would result without a flow being made available.

The Commonwealth Environment Water Holder, Jody Swirepik will be in Bourke for three (3) days next week and will take the opportunity to familiarise herself with the area including a visit to Tooralé.

Jody will also meet with representatives of Councils and other stakeholders during her visit.

The familiarisation exercise held last Wednesday to provide the opportunity for all Tourist Operators to experience first-hand some of the attractions that Bourke has to offer met with a reasonable response, with a number of people who had not previously been able to attend or participate in the attractions taking the opportunity to do so. All residents and tourist operators can be great ambassadors for our town and it is important that they are able to speak with confidence regarding what the town has to offer.

The next Ordinary Meeting of Bourke Shire Council will be held on Monday, 28th May 2018 commencing at 9.00am in the Council Chambers at 29 Mitchell Street Bourke. A Public Forum will be held at 10.00am. Whilst not essential people wishing to speak at the Public Forum are encouraged to contact Kai Howard-Oakman by calling 02 68308000 or by email at khoward@bourke.nsw.gov.au so that if necessary, background information may be researched on the issue on which they wish to speak.

One of the most important items on the agenda for the meeting will be the consideration of any submissions received in respect of the 2018/2019 Operational Plan. Any Submissions received must be considered before Council prior to its adoption of the 2018/2019 Operational Plan.

The Operational Plan sets the budget for the year and includes the determination of the rating structure and other charges for the year.

Quote of the week!

"Share your smile with the world. It's a symbol of friendship and peace". Christie Brinkley

Ross Earl
General Manager