



“From the GM’s Desk”

31st December 2019



The water situation in the Bourke Shire is dire indeed with a period of 163 days having elapsed since a flow has gone over the weir at Bourke. This is the second longest period since 1944 when there was a period of 196 days between 20th September 2006 to 4th April 2007.

The height in the weir pool has now dropped to below 2.5 metres.

This in turn has resulted in Bourke Shire having to go on level four (4) water restrictions for the first time.

Had it not been for the environmental flow delivered by the Northern Connectivity event last year this period would be well and truly in record territory with my estimation that the Northern Connectivity Event provided at least a three (3) month flow in the river and when that was added to the current period of no flow it would mean the period of no flow would be the highest on record.

With the introduction of level (4) restrictions I like to highlight that the main difference from level three (3) restrictions is that hand watering is now limited to ONE (1) HOUR PER DAY

THE USE OF FIXED SPRINKLERS IS BANNED.

There are other restrictions in place and I would encourage those with access to the internet to look at the Bourke Shire website www.bourke.nsw.gov.au to get a full understanding of the implications of the restrictions at the various levels.

The trigger to go to level 5 restrictions is when the level in the weir pool drops to below 2.00 metres and our computer modelling coupled with the limited historical data available suggests that this will be at the end of February or early March.

Council is in relatively uncharted territory having not been on level four (4) water restrictions previously.

Council is fortunate to have a bore to be able to utilise to supplement the river supply. Work is planned for the drilling of an additional bore which will hopefully produce sufficient water of a suitable quality to enable the domestic supply to Bourke to continue but will not be sufficient quantities to allow for the watering of gardens.

Council is looking at all options to ensure that everything is being done to secure a water flow in the Darling River which would supply Bourke. Council, however, has been advised that there may not be sufficient water held for environment purposed to allow this to happen. None the less Council will continue with its representations in this regard.

In the interim I would ask that everyone complies with the restrictions that are in place remembering that we are all in this together and a sense of fairness should prevail.

I would like to point out that the Local Government (General) Regulation 2005 through clauses 137 and 144 gives Council the authority to both institute restrictions in certain circumstances including drought and/or scarcity of supply. If persons fail to comply with these restrictions Council may disconnect or restrict the supply of water to their property.

The Australia Day celebrations were held in Bourke last Saturday at the Bourke War Memorial Swimming Pool with free entry available all day

The hot weather certainly doesn't generally encourage people to leave their air conditioning of their homes but there was a very good crowd in attendance that enjoyed the cool and relaxed atmosphere of the pool area.

They had the opportunity to participate in the Australia Day Celebrations and listen to our Australia Day Ambassador Jay Allen. Jay gave a very good address focussing both on his journey as a survivor of melanoma and importantly on what he and others have been doing in creating an increased awareness of melanoma.

Awards were made in the various categories and all winners are to be congratulated. The winners were

Citizen of the Year: Patricia Mann

Young Citizen of the Year: Isaac Ford

Sportsperson: Clay Simmons

Young Sportsperson: Archie Nott

Emergency Service Volunteer of the Year: Rodney Vincent

All recipients were deserved winners of their respective categories and I would like to add my congratulations to each of them. In congratulating the winners I would also mention there were

once again some very good nominations in all categories and I would like to thank everyone who took the time to submit a nomination.

Many readers would have seen the press reports in relation to the meeting proposed between the Mayors and representatives of the Far West Councils and Minister for Regional Water the Hon Niall Blair MLC, with the absence of the Minister drawing a lot of criticism. This in my view detracted from what was a very constructive meeting bringing together a large number of important players each of whom will play an important part in overcoming the problems that we are currently facing in regard to water or lack of.

The meeting was called as a result of a teleconference on the 8th January 2019 convened and hosted by Bourke Shire Council to discuss the dire state of the Barwon Darling System and to try and establish both short term and long term strategies to overcome the problems.

Assisting in the coordination of the second meeting was Emma Bradbury Chief Executive of the Murray Darling Association which is the peak Local Government body Australia wide in relation to the Murray Darling system

It was unfortunate that the Minister could not attend; however, this inability to attend was indicated quite early with the intention of the Minister to dial in via teleconference if able to do so.

Also invited to and subsequently attending that this meeting representatives of most if not all the peak bodies involved in water issues impacting on this part of the State.

These included the Executive Director- Water, Department of Industry of Water Rachel Connell, the Acting Commonwealth Environment Water Holder Hilton Taylor, Mr Phillip Glyde Chief Executive Officer of the Murray Darling Basin authority, Mick Keelty the Northern Basin Commissioner, representatives from the Ministers Offices, Graeme Enders from the New South Wales Office of Department of Environment and Heritage, Jock Laurie the New Wales Drought Commissioner together with other representatives from those organisations.

The meeting was Chaired by Mayor of Bourke Barry Hollman gave the opportunity for the Mayors of Broken Hill, Brewarrina, Balranald and Walgett and the General Manager of Central Darling Shire Council to articulate their concerns to those assembled and ask them as a collective to assist with the identification to solutions.

Whilst not invited to the meeting the Premier of New South Wales Hon Gladys Berejiklian took the opportunity after the meeting to ring Mayor Hollman to indicate her support to the Far West Councils.

There was very much a consensus that there is an urgent need for action and Bourke Shire has committed to hosting another teleconference to further progress the issue.

With a number of the Councils along the Barwon Darling now relying on bore water the health of the river has become a critical issue and a solution needs to be found before we have irreparable damage created.

The lack of a flow can create economic social health and environmental issues for all those living along the Barwon Darling.

The Annual Conference of the Western Division Shires will be held in Bourke on the 24th 25th and 26th February 2019 and with a number of issues of importance including water availability. A very good response to the invitations to attend has been received

All member Councils of the Western Division have indicated their proposed attendance whilst a number of others who have previously been members, including Bogan, Brewarrina, Carrathool and Moree Plains Shires have indicated that they will also be attending; whilst others from within the area including Gilgandra, Warren , Warrumbungle, Dubbo and Coonamble have indicated their intention to attend.

The Deputy Premier, the Hon. John Barilaro, MP last week confirmed his attendance and in addition to opening the Conference will deliver an address and has indicated his willingness to take part in question and answer session. Also confirming their attendance are the Shadow Minister of Local Government, the Hon. Peter Primrose MLC, The Chief Executive of The Office of Local Government, Tim Hurst and the President of Local Government New South Wales, Linda Scott and The Hon. Sarah Mitchell, MLC, Minister for Early Childhood Education, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and Assistant Minister for Education. The Minister for Primary Industries and Regional Water Hon Niall Blair has at this stage flagged his intention to be at the conference.

A presentation by the New South Wales Grants Commission will be provided with all members of the Commission being in attendance

Parliamentary Secretary for Western Division, the Hon. Rick Colless, MLC will also attend as will Local Member for Barwon, Kevin Humphries. There are a number of others who have expressed a desire to attend but need to confirm other commitments being able to accept the invitation to attend.

As part of the conference there will be a candidate's forum during which all the candidates for the seat of Barwon will be given the opportunity to both detail their plans for the region and also answer questions from the floor.

At this stage all intending candidates have been invited and all with the exception of Independent Candidate Phil Naden have indicated that they will attend. Phil is an apology.

Whilst in Sydney for the meeting relating to the Barwon Darling System The Mayor Councillor Barry Hollman, The Manager of Corporate Services Leonie Brown and I met with the Michael Blackmore Director of Water Utilities Land and Water Division of the New South Wales Department of Industry and the newly appointed Manager of Water Utilities Central and Western New South Wales David Swan. We discussed the potential of an emerging water crisis for the town of Bourke if an adequate supplementary supply could not be identified. Manager of Works Peter Brown was able to join via teleconference.

The meeting was very fruitful and there was certainly a very strong desire to work with Council in averting any potential for a crisis and to have a plan and solution in place as soon as practical.

To that end David Swan will be in Bourke this week to work through our identified strategy.

There are a number of approvals that need to be obtained and funding sources identified prior to drilling new bores, however, we seem to have most of those in hand at the moment and everything is gradually falling in place to allow drilling to commence in a couple of weeks.

A good news story in relation to water issues a storm over the catchment in Byrock last week has averted the need for Council to institute carting to the village for at least six (6) weeks with the storm providing good rainfall and run off from the catchment into the ground water storage.

Prior to the storm it was thought that carting would need to commence in the first week of February and Council had already made application to the Minister for funding in that regards.

In previous years approval for carting has been obtained with that approval being for the balance of the financial year.

As part of the Drought funding providing under the Federal Governments Drought Communities fund well known poet comedian Murray Hartin has been engaged to undertake a series of performances across the villages within the Shire and will be performing at the following venues

Thursday 21st February 2019- Byrock
Friday 22nd February 2019- Fords Bridge
Saturday 23rd February 2019- Louth
Sunday 24th February 2019 Wanaaring

All performances will be held at the local Hotels and are free of charge with a free barbeque also being arranged where possible.

All performances will commence at 7.00pm and conclude at 10.00pm

Bourke Shire is pleased to be able to work with the Federal Government in coordinating the performances for the residents of these drought impacted areas.

Bourke Shire Council has been advised by the member for Barwon Kevin Humphries MP of its successful application under the drought Relief Heavy Vehicle Access Scheme which is aimed at improving heavy vehicle access in support of the drought relief effort.

The grant of \$300,000.00 will be allocated to the Hungerford Road in the area near Naree, North of Yantabulla which is an identified trouble during wet weather in particular. The proposal is to reconstruct and seal approximately 3 kilometres of that section of road which will be no doubt welcomed by all users from the Hungerford region.

Council has also been notified of its successful application under the 2018/2019 Regional Roads Repair Program for an allocation of \$400,000.00 which will be utilised to further extend the work of the Wanaaring Road by a further 6.08kilomtres which will see the reconstruction and sealing works edge further to Wanaaring. Funding for this project will also include \$500,000.00 from Council making the total cost \$900,000.00.

With one of our daughters and family living in Quebec, Canada Annette and I keep an eye on the weather conditions over there and last week while we were sweltering in temperatures approaching 50 degrees the temperature where they live was MINUS 25 degrees, with snow blanketing their yard and the roadway. Certainly a very big difference in temperature.

Quote of the week!

"Water is the driving force of all nature." – Leonardo Da Vinci

Ross Earl
General Manager