



# “From the GM’s Desk”

## 21st February 2019



Monday 18th February 2019 marked 184 days since the river has flowed across the weir at Bourke gradually edging its way towards the record of 196 days which will be reached on the 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2019.

The river continues to drop at around 1.5 centimetres per day and as at Monday 18<sup>th</sup> February the water level at Bourke was 2.22 metres and if predictions are accurate that will result in the level of the river dropping to 2.00 metres on or around 4<sup>th</sup> March 2019 which will be the catalyst for the introduction of level 5 water restrictions.

With the introduction of level five (5) water restrictions the most significant change is that all outside watering is banned, except by the use of buckets, and the bleed off for evaporative air conditioners is also banned. However, at its meeting on Monday Council has relaxed the banning of bleed off provision and have asked that residents reduce the bleed off.

Council is conscious of the difficulties that the restrictions cause to everyone but recognise the need to ensure that the remaining supply of water is conserved.

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The drilling contractors who are undertaking the construction of the new bore on Hungerford Road have started their set up and hope to finish construction of the new bore in approximately two (2) weeks.

Work on the pipeline will commence on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> February 2019 and it is expected to be completed by the end of February 2019.

All materials required to commission the bore have been ordered and should be available to have the bore operational by the mid- March. Much depends on the ability of the bore to be able to produce the quality and quantity of water required. The fact that the surrounding bores are able to produce the quality and quantity required gives us a degree of confidence.

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Council representatives are continuing to liaise with the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holders Office to try and secure an environmental flow in the Barwon Darling System with the

low levels of water posing a risk to both the fish population and other wildlife who depend on the river.

An environmental flow will also have some significant positive impacts on residents and towns along the river system who also depend on the river as their primary source of water.

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I attended a Meeting of the Orana Regional Group of General Managers last week which was held in Nyngan. The Group was formally known as the General Managers Advisory Committee (GMAC) for the Orana Regional organisation of Councils (OROC). However, with the demise of OROC and the establishment of Joint Organisation of Councils (JOs) the structure has changed slightly. General Managers from both Councils who are members of either the Orana JO and The Far North West JO and General Managers of the unaligned Councils all participating equally.

The GMAC group coordinates a number of professional development groups for each of the Councils. GMAC is still involved in the negotiation of electricity contracts and will continue to operate to provide collegiate support and advice amongst those staff involved from the various Councils.

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One of the other changes with the winding up of OROC was the winding up of the Lower Macquarie Water Utilities Alliance (LMWUA)

The LMWUA has been replaced with the Orana Water Utilities Alliance (OWUA) with the membership of the OWUA mirroring that of LMWUA with the exception that Dubbo and Coonamble have elected not to join.

The OWUA is under the guidance of General Manager Brad Cam of Mid-Western Regional Council and Mid-Western are also the sponsoring Council and employer of the project Officer on a part-time basis.

While operating slightly differently to the LMWUA the new organisation still provided a great deal of support and professional development opportunities for those involved in Water and Waste Water management roles in the respective member Councils .

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Council welcomes all delegates to the 2019 Annual Conference of the Western Division Councils of NSW which will commence on Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> February 2019.

Bourke Shire Council is pleased to be able to host the Conference and trust all delegates enjoy their stay in Bourke.

A considerable amount of work goes into the coordination of the conference and I would like to thank all members of staff who have combined in a great team effort to "make it happen"

The conference will utilise the newly renovated "Back O Bourke" Function Centre for the first time for the Conference Dinner which will be held on the Monday evening.

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The President of Local Government New South Wales Linda Scott has asked to be able to meet with Councillors and the Management Team of Bourke Shire Council and plans have been put into place for that meeting to be held at 4.00pm on Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> February 2019 prior to the welcome reception for Conference delegates to be held later that afternoon.

Councillor Scott will be accompanied by the new Chief Executive Officer of Local Government New South Wales Tara McCarthy who will only begin working with LGNSW on the 21<sup>st</sup> February. The Western Division Conference will be her first visit to rural New South Wales in her new role. Also accompanying Councillor Scott will be the Director of Advocacy Kylie Yates and the Director of Industrial Relations at LGNSW Lillian Tiddy.

Lillian and Kylie shared the role of Acting CEO while Tara's appointment was being finalised and did an excellent job during that period.

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The Western Division Conference has proved extremely popular and the opportunity has been taken to convene a number of other meetings during and after the conference.

Councillor Scott will also seek to meet other Councils during the Conference on a one on one basis whilst the Commissioner for Small Business Robyn Hobbs AM will also be talking to the attending Councils.

Following the conclusion of the conference the Meeting of the Far North West Joint Organisation of Councils will be held. The Auditor General Margaret Crawford will be attending this meeting as will representatives of the Office of Local Government and representatives of the Department of Premier and Cabinet

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The Department of Planning have also convened a meeting of the Far West Delivery, Coordination and Monitoring Committee for post Conference. The Committee is made up of both State and Local Government representatives and has a general oversight of the implementation of the Far West Regional Plan

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Cost Shifting has been an issue for Local Government and in their latest weekly newsletter to Councils Local Government New South Wales (LGNSW) details the following

LGNSW have for a number of years focused on cost shifting which effectively moves costs from the responsibility of the State and Federal Governments to Local Government.

Cost shifting is one of the most significant problems faced by councils in NSW. Along with rate capping, cost shifting undermines the financial sustainability of the Local Government sector by forcing councils to assume responsibility for more infrastructure and services, without sufficient corresponding revenue.

For the past decade, LGNSW has monitored the cost of this practice to ratepayers. Despite recognition of its adverse impacts, cost shifting by the State and Federal Governments onto councils is now at its highest recorded level in NSW.

LGNSW's latest survey puts cost shifting onto NSW councils in the 2015/16 financial year at \$820 million. This is a \$150 million increase on 2013/14, and takes the accumulated total cost shifting burden on councils to an estimated \$6.2 billion since the survey began 10 years ago.

LGNSW research shows another concerning trend: not only does cost shifting continue to grow; it is growing at an accelerated rate.

The per annum cost shift has more than doubled in a single decade. LGNSW data shows this trend is being driven largely by state government policies, particularly the waste levy. The Federal Government is responsible for just 2% of the cost shifting burden borne by councils each year.

The collective cost to Councils from the cost shifting burden now exceeds the estimated annual infrastructure renewal gap of \$500 million per annum (which is the gap between what councils need to spend on their existing infrastructure and what they can actually afford). Cost shifting is increasingly impeding Local Government's ability to deliver services and maintain infrastructure for communities.

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Tenders for the provision of air services to Bourke, Cobar, Walgett and/or Lightning Ridge closed at 10am Tuesday 12 Feb. 2019 and two (2) tenders were received.

The tenders will now be evaluated by the panel for a report to the Far North Western Joint Organisation of Councils (FNWJO Board) for final determination.

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As part of the Drought funding provided 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 21<sup>st</sup> February 2019- Byrock  
Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2019- Fords Bridge  
Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2019- Louth  
Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> 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.

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With Council now imposing level 4 water restrictions I would like to advise that these restrictions generally apply to all Council facilities and parks as well. However, a decision has been made to ensure our primary sporting and recreational facilities are kept to a high standard despite the drought conditions and as such water at the Bourke War Memorial Pool, Coolican Oval Davidson Oval and Central Park which will all remain on the level 3 restrictions as will the Bourke Bowling Club.

It is important for the social well-being of the community that these facilities are maintained.

At the meeting of Council held on Monday it was resolved to continue watering its primary recreational parks to provide a green space for residents and provide the opportunity for recreational and sporting activities to continue.

The matter will be reviewed as required.

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Water restrictions apply to **BOTH filtered and raw (non- potable)** and the ongoing cooperation of residents in abiding by the restrictions is appreciated.

Council has the legislative power to reduce the supply to or disconnect the supply of water to properties who fail to abide by the restrictions.

Whilst that power exists it is hoped that it will not be needed with a sense of community and respect for fellow residents will see ALL residents comply.

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The NSW Government has provided grants of up to \$300,000 under the Drought Relief Heavy Vehicle Access Scheme towards costs of maintenance and improvements on council roads, e.g. shoulder repairs, road surface repairs and signage

Recently completed projects which improve freight access for drought relief can be considered. Improvements will be made to freight links that provide relief to other parts of the local road network.

Councils are receiving much needed funds to support the increased movement of stock, feed and water as part of the drought relief.

Bourke Shire Council received \$300,000 to help with road maintenance and improvements to accommodate increased freight movements on the Hungerford Road.

The changes will support farmers impacted by the drought by improving heavy vehicle access on local roads, which has increased as a result of the drought conditions.

Bourke Shire Council will complete the construction of 2.5 km of sealed road adjacent to Kia-Ora and Naree Stations which will relieve stress and strain on heavy vehicle access as well as safety for all motorists.

The project would not be possible without the help of Naree Station supplying the water from Kenmere bore to complete the roadworks. The project is scheduled to start on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2019 and be completed by 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2019.

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"Dial Before You Dig" are one of the sponsors of the Western Division Conference and whilst in town have agreed to conduct a seminar for Council staff and Local Tradies who need to access the services of "Dial Before you Dig".

The seminar for Council staff and tradespersons will commence at 7.00am in the Council Chambers on Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> February 2019.

With telecommunication cables being an important part of our lives these days it is important that they are not cut and the utilisation of "Dial before You Dig" is certainly a great service to mitigate that risk.

This a great opportunity for local tradespersons to find out a little more about "Dial Before You Dig"

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Bourke Shire Council received a couple of pallets of bottled water for distribution amongst the community and the opportunity will be taken to distribute these to the village and rural areas who don't have a reticulated potable supply.

The water was kindly donated by Correctional Officers from Correctional Centres at Kariiong Central Coast, and Dubbo.

The coordination of the project was undertaken by Greg Mohr from Dubbo who is an ex-Brewarrina resident and is also a Councillor on Dubbo Regional Council.

Brewarrina were also recipients of a donation and our thanks go to Mayor of Brewarrina Phillip O'Connor for the coordination of the unloading and storage of the donated water.

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Council has applied for funding to undertake the completion of the emergency works required to implement the emergency water supply currently being completed.

The cost of the current works when fully completed will exceed one million dollars which is on top of the money already expended on the commissioning of Walkden's Bore the initial treatment facilities and the pipeline into town.

There has been a strategy developed and there will be further works required to complete that strategy.

Council in addition to the supply of water has to mitigate other risks such as extended blackouts when the supply is reliant on electricity to a large degree.

As part of the risk mitigation Council has acquired generators which can be utilised in case of a power failure.

To mitigate the risk of lack of water in case of fire Council has isolated one of its reservoirs as a precautionary measure.

The water supply as mentioned earlier is diminishing so we need to ensure we have contingency plans in place.

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Quote of the week!

*Pure Water is the World's First and Foremost Medicine. – Slovakian Proverb.*

*Ross Earl*  
General Manager