



“FROM THE GM’S DESK”

9TH MAY 2019



As of Tuesday, 7th May 2019, the Darling River at Bourke will have stopped flowing over the weir at Bourke for 264 days, far exceeding the previous record created in 2006 of 200 days.

The period of no flow across the weir will reach 273 days or 39 weeks on the 16th May 2019.

The town of Bourke has been on water restrictions for this period and without the introductions of restrictions and the compliance with these restrictions by the majority of residents the situation we have faced could have been much worse.

The recent rain resulted in Council being able to reinstate the raw water supply to North Bourke which had been suspended due to the perilously low water level in the weir pool that services the North Bourke area.

While the recent rain has been welcomed and certainly had an impact, it is not yet drought breaking.

Water down the Warrego has been welcomed by those in Louth and downstream and will hopefully find its way much further down the Darling to the benefit of those communities and farmers along the river.

The flow in the Culgoa River is promising and will hopefully find its way into the Darling and then into the Bourke Weir Pool. The dry river beds had been seen as an impediment to the flow but the recent rain will improve the chances of the flow reaching Bourke.

The same situation applies to the recently announced Environmental Flow with the initial estimates on how far the flow would reach being based on an extremely dry river bed in much of the river. However, a combination of rain and inflows in the upper reaches of the river have provided much better conditions in the river and again the flow may travel much further than originally anticipated.

The initial predictions had been for the flow to possibly reach Brewarrina but with the Brewarrina Weir Pool now full I think we can have a degree of optimism that it will make it much further, however, this optimism will need to be tempered with a little caution.

A reminder that Level Five (5) Water Restrictions are in place in Bourke and North Bourke and will remain in place until we get a substantive improvement in the level of water in the weir pool.

While acknowledging the welcome rain it only put a few centimetres in the weir pool and it should be remembered that in addition to the Bourke water supply there are other users who rely on the Bourke Weir Pool for stock and domestic purposes.

While on water supply generally, I would like to acknowledge the efforts of Councillors and staff at Bourke Shire Council who have worked tirelessly on ensuring that Bourke did not run out of water including the construction of new bores and pipelines, seeking funding to undertake emergency works and liaising with all relevant authorities in an attempt to have an environmental flow made available.

Much of the work goes largely unnoticed and involves countless hours.

Included in this work was the coordination of all agencies to ensure fire capability was maintained when the raw water supply to North Bourke had to be suspended due to the low levels.

The fact that we have a contingency plan for a water supply for Bourke in the event of the ability to access the river ceased was a combination of work over the past ten years and has involved considerable effort.

Council's first priority has been the immediate issues we face, but in determining a solution to these problems has been consideration given to longer term and the adopted strategy incorporates provision for the longer term.

No doubt the situation we find ourselves now will be replicated in the future as we go through the cycle of drought and flood and it is important that we increase our preparedness.

There have a number of people who have helped Council through this difficult situation including number of State Government agencies and our appreciation is extended to those agencies.

With all water supplies there a number of approvals to be obtained, fees applicable and Council has been required to comply with these requirements but the urgency of the situation has been recognised and assistance being made available as required.

Locally, we have been assisted by local landowners, with Peter Harris of Clyde Cotton making available a large pump for a number of weeks to enable water to be pumped downstream into the weir pool to ensure that not only was there a supply available in the weir pool but that it was also at a level at which Council's pumps could operate.

Joe Robinson of Australian Food and Fibre not only quickly turned around a number of forms required to allow drilling of new bores adjacent to their properties to be undertaken as expeditiously as possible but also gave Council temporary use of a 40 megalitre licence free of charge so that Council had an immediate entitlement to water to utilise the bores.

The Old Family at Belvedere allowed testing to be undertaken on their bore to see if it could be utilised in an emergency situation by linking it into the new bore supply network and have allowed some of the emergency supply infrastructure to be located on their property.

All had no hesitation in assisting Council when approached and were extremely helpful and on behalf of the community, I say thank you to all concerned.

Bourke Shire Council's Draft Operational Plan (Budget) for 2019/2020 is currently on display with submissions in relation to the Operational Plan able to be lodged any time during the display period which concludes on the 10th May 2019.

Council will consider the Draft Operational Plan for 2019/2020 and any submissions received in respect of the Plan at its Ordinary Meeting of Council to be held on the 27th May 2019 prior to its adoption at that meeting.

Council has been asked to consider a proposal to introduce 40kph speed limit in Oxley Street between Richard and Sturt Streets to ensure an increased level of safety for pedestrians in the area.

The redevelopment of the precinct is in part based on increased pedestrian activity and the improved amenity of the area with the proposed reduction of the speed limit consistent with that objective. Council invites comment from residents in relation to the proposed change to the speed limit.

Submissions in relation to the proposed change to the speed limit in Oxley Street between Richard and Sturt Street can be made by 9.00am, Monday, 20th May 2019 and should be addressed to the General Manger, Bourke Shire Council, PO Box 21 Bourke 2840.

Following a series of meetings, the route for this year's Tour De OROC has been determined and the group will be in Bourke on Wednesday, 9th October 2019. The group will in Lightning Ridge the night before. The group have not previously stopped at Lightning Ridge and were keen to do so given it is part of the OROC Region. However, it means that part of the route on the Wednesday will be undertaken by bus to negate the extremely long distance that would otherwise have to be undertaken.

I am confident that the Bourke community will once again support the Tour de OROC in its fundraising efforts, with all funds going to Macquarie Homestay in Dubbo which provides accommodation for people who need to travel to Dubbo for medical treatment.

Together with the Mayor, Councillor Barry Hollman, I joined with other community members at the Official Opening of the New TAFE Building which is called a Connected Learning Centre.

The opening was followed by an inspection of the facility.

It is certainly a very impressive facility containing state of the art technology.

The Mayor and I had the opportunity to meet with the new Member for Barwon, Roy Butler over lunch on Wednesday. Roy has indicated that he will be retaining Offices in Broken Hill, Narrabri and Cobar and said we can expect to see much more of him during the next four (4) years. Roy was accompanied by senior staff member, John Clements and the Shooters Farmers and Fishers Candidate for the Senate in the upcoming election, Brett Cook.

On Wednesday evening I attended the Ceremony for the five (5) students from Bourke TAFE who graduated with a qualification in early childhood. All students are employees of Bourke and District Children's Services and their undertaking of the course was a result of the cooperation between both TAFE Western and that local organisation.

In an industry which apparently has 96% of all employees being female it was good to see two (2) of the graduating students being male which will assist in gradually breaking down this gender imbalance.

The Far North West Joint Organisation of Councils (FNWJOC) has called applications for a Chief Executive Officer.

Advertisements for the role will appear in the various media outlets across the region covered by the FNWJOC as well as the Sydney Press.

General Manager of Cobar Shire, Peter Vlatko is currently acting in the role pending the permanent appointment. Peter has been assisted in the role by Mark Riley who is working as a Project Officer

Bourke's Australia Day Ambassador in 2018 was Katryna Robinson and she founded a charity called *"Every Little Bit Helps"* which coordinates the collection and distribution of unwanted hotel toiletries, inflight amenity kits, and cosmetic and make-up samples.

These goods are then distributed to people in need, such as the homeless and those forced to seek temporary accommodation in refuges.

Following the visit by Katryna, Bourke Shire Council established a collection point at the Library and the local CWA makes up packs for distribution.

I am a regular donor and I would encourage anyone who has the opportunity to be able to contribute to do so, as it is a really worthwhile charity and costs very little for the positive impact it achieves.

Bourke Shire Council has developed a DRAFT CODE OF MEETING PRACTICE in accordance with section 360 of the Local Government Act 1993 and is required under section 361 of that Act to exhibit the Draft Code of Meeting Practice for at least 28 days and allow members of the community at least 42 days in which to comment of the Draft Code.

The Draft Code of Meeting Practice for Bourke Shire Council was on public exhibition from 28th March 2019 to the 26th April 2019 and submissions in respect of the Draft Code will be received up until 10th May 2019.

At the meeting of Council held on the 29th April 2019 Council appointed Dr Sally Torr as its delegate to Outback Arts, with Councillor John Thompson now assuming the role as alternate delegate.

Outback Arts is an organisation with a focus of increasing participation in and development of all types of the Arts in this part of the State.

Outback Arts is based in Coonamble and covers the Local Government Areas of Coonamble Bourke, Warren, Walgett, Brewarrina and Cobar Shires.

I note that the Annual Conference of New South Wales Country Women's Association is being held this week with representatives of local Branches including Enngonia, Wanaaring and Bourke making their way to Albury to ensure the views of the residents of this area are being put forward.

CWA is reputedly the strongest lobby group in New South Wales and such is a force to be reckoned with and opinions valued.

The recent rain whilst welcomed has caused some damage to the vast road network under Council's control. All regional roads are currently being monitored for damage post rain. Works to be undertaken include grading, filling in of washouts, gutters some of which need a few loads of gravel.

These roads, are Bourke to Wilcannia, Bourke to Hungerford, Bourke to Wanaaring and Louth to Cobar.

All rural local roads are being inspected as the wet weather allows, which in turn will identify any areas that are deemed unsafe. These areas are dealt with on a case by case basis.

As mentioned in last week's column, Council is concerned by the damaged being caused by persons who are using road during wet weather and causing considerable damage to the road surface. The use of the roads during such conditions not only places the drivers and passengers at risk by the damage caused to the road surface is also a significant drain on the budget and more importantly places other road users at risk which increases as the surface dries and deep rutting of the surface sets hard.

I was asked to give an indication of the number of jobs lost within the rural sector due to the drought and I decided to make a few calls to get an idea of the situation.

My enquiries revealed that over the past few years in excess of 60 jobs have been lost and that figure would increase by another 20 if this included the loss of the casual jobs provided each year revolving around the cotton harvest and ginning.

The loss of employment and income not only impacts on the farming and grazing sectors but those in ancillary and supporting industries including fuel supply, transport, fencing and general rural supplies.

The rain last week had a very positive impact of the area and none more so than Byrock which received good falls and will negate the need to cart water for the next few months according to the locals.

Carting will have to continue for the next few days whilst the water settles and clears in the ground tank.

Quote of the week!

Positivity, confidence, and persistence are key in life, so never give up on yourself.

Khalid

Ross Earl
General Manager