



“FROM THE GM’S DESK”

31ST OCTOBER 2019



The long awaited return of an air service to Bourke is getting closer with the current plan being for the first flight to arrive in Bourke on the 25th November 2019 and it is anticipated that the first flight to Walgett and Lightning Ridge will commence on the same day.

Flights to Cobar have been operating for a few weeks.

Representatives from Airlink are aiming to be in Bourke next Monday, 4th November 2019 to finalise local arrangements in relation to the proposed new service.

The General Manager of Airlink, Ron O'Brien said that his staff will be at the Bourke Airport between 12.30 and 3.30pm and will be available to answer questions. Airlink will also have one of their planes for inspection.

I am confident that the air service will be well patronised and will be a boost to tourism and also provide a much greater access to Bourke for the large number of Health Professionals who visit on a regular basis.

Work is continuing on the new pipeline from Walkden's Bore into Bourke which will provide a much greater capacity for the existing two (2) bores plus cater for the anticipated flow from the new bore proposed to be constructed at Belvedere.

Work is also being undertaken on the upgrading of the cooling tower and pumping facility at Walkden's Bore to cater for the increase in water supply from the new bore to ensure it is able to be aerated and subject to preliminary treatment.

Work is continuing on the procurement and installation of the desalination plant for Bourke, however, the initial timeframe of the end of November has now been revised with the operational date now likely to be early February.

The initial timeframe may have been a little optimistic given the complexity of the project, but work by Public Works Advisory who are coordinating the project is continuing with regular meetings being held with representatives of the Councils which will see the desalination plants installed in their areas.

As of Sunday, 27th October 2019, the Darling River will have stopped flowing over the weir at Bourke for **435 days**.

The river height was 2.38 metres at Bourke over the weekend and the level of the water has dropping at the rate of around one (1) centimetre per day.

This rate of loss will increase as the weather heats up and the level of evaporation will increase as a result.

A reminder that level four (4) restrictions are in place with no fixed sprinklers allowed and hand held hoses for one (1) hour per day.

A full listing of the restrictions is detailed on the Bourke Shire Website, www.bourke.nsw.gov.au

With the Darling River dropping at the rate of one (1) centimetre per day it is likely that level four (4) water restrictions will remain in place for around the next five (5) weeks when a move to **level five (5)** would need to be considered.

Whilst Council has the ability to fine residents for non-compliance with restrictions and restrict supply theses are only instituted as a last resort and it is hoped that all residents recognise the important of compliance with restrictions and not only their legal responsibility to do so but their moral obligation.

IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT THE RESTRICTIONS APPLY TO BOTH FILTERED AND RAW WATER SUPPLIES.

The Annual Graffiti Day in Bourke was held last Friday with a small number of participants assisting on the day.

However, the small group did very well and managed to undertake a considerable amount of graffiti removal and make a difference.

Graffiti Removal Day is a State Government Initiative to inspire people to volunteer to remove and prevent graffiti in their neighbourhoods.

Materials required for removal of the graffiti on the day are supplied free of charge, due to the generous sponsorship of Industry and the State Government.

Locally Woods Bros Hardware were the distributor of the materials.

As the river water level drops and Bourke and North Bourke become reliant on bore water the question has been raised as to what provision has been made for water to be reserved for fire-fighting purposes.

One of the two (2) reservoirs in Bourke has been isolated for fighting purposes with the Council staff on standby to be able to access the water should it be required. The water in the other tank will still be permanently filled and once we go to level (5) restrictions should remain if residents comply with restrictions

The raw water supply at North Bourke is not subject to storage but is fed directly from the river pumps and once level five (5) restrictions come into force the pumps will only need to be used in cases of emergency as all outside watering will be prohibited

If the River drops to a level when the pumps are unable to be utilised, then the fire capability will be dependent on the filtered water supply.

Council staff have undertaken work that will allow filtered water to be transferred to the raw water network should it be required. Council staff members are on call to undertake the transfer as quickly as possible.

The need to retain fire-fighting capability at North Bourke and indeed within Bourke itself will be a major consideration as restrictions tighten further over the next few months.

The issue of being able to respond to emergencies will be raised at the meeting of the Local Emergency Management Committee which I Chair which is to be held on the 5th November 2019.

There is a great deal of cooperation between the agencies involved in the Local Emergency Management Committee and I am sure that a solution to the issue that is suitable to all parties will be developed.

The shortage of water and very dry conditions right across the state has posed difficulties for fire fighters and unfortunately there have been a number of fires across the state with some causing significant losses.

Residents are asked to be extremely cautious regarding the use of anything which may pose a fire risk and to be mindful of all fire restrictions which may be in place. A careless act can not only pose a risk to property but can also put the lives of firefighters at risk as they try to contain any resultant fire.

The Rural Fire Service (RFS) provides information regarding fire restrictions and in particular days on which total fire bans are in place.

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment has recently commissioned Public Works Advisory to undertake a Drought Management Plan Audit project.

The project is part of the NSW Government's response to the unprecedented drought that is impacting a large proportion of NSW.

The project aims to enhance the work that the Department and Local Government are already doing to facilitate and implement local drought management measures to extend or secure town water supplies in Regional NSW.

The project will review the current situation and application of Council's Drought Management Plan but will also give Council an opportunity to explore further drought management measures that could be employed straight away or as the drought continues.

The report will give Council areas to focus but also provide guidance to the NSW Government's continued drought response.

Bourke Shire Council along with Tamworth and Dubbo Regional Councils have been selected as pilot Councils before rolling a refined methodology out to further Councils following a risk based approach.

Public Works Advisory Officers were in Bourke earlier in the week to have a discussion around setting up a timeframe to undertake this project.

The project is designed to be undertaken as quickly as possible and provide tangible benefits to Councils and making the Council time and resources dedicated to this exercise well worth it.

Annette and I are very happy to welcome another grandchild into our family. Loïque was born four (4) weeks ago and is a second son for our daughter Gillian and her husband Jean-Luc and a brother for Pascale and Olivier.

The new amphitheatre in Darling Park at the corner of Mitchell and Sturt Streets will get its first use this weekend with a performance by Isaiah Firebrace who is an accomplished singer and was the winner X Factor Australia in 2016.

The Performance is free to everyone and has been coordinated by Maranguka and supported by Bourke Shire Council.

The entertainment will start at 7.30pm in the cool of the evening and finish around 9.30pm.

It is family friendly event and will be the start of what it is hoped to be regular entertainment at the venue.

While it is a while off yet I would encourage all our seniors to put in their diaries the 1st December 2019 which is the date of the Annual Rotary Christmas function which will be held at the Bourke Bowling Club.

At the October Meeting of Bourke Shire Council, Councillors voted to expedite the investigative work involved in the planning of new water storages within the shire along the Darling River. All options are to be considered.

The proposals calls upon Council to engage an appropriately qualified consultant to complete and cost a scoping/design study for a shovel ready plan to secure the water supply from the Darling River for the towns and villages situated on the river within the Bourke Shire area.

The review will include consideration of all previous reports and studies plus any new ideas which can in turn be evaluated by the appointed consultant.

Council has allocated \$250,000.00 from the Water Fund Reserves to assist in the payment of the study and evaluation involved.

Council felt that whilst the emergency water supplies needs of the shire are being met through the funding provided by the State Government the emergency funding only provides for critical human needs and there is also a need for water for environmental and social purposes.

Councillors agreed that it was time to act and take a proactive approach to the issue of severe water shortages which will no doubt be replicated in the future.

Council will be very interested in the development of the Western Weirs Strategy and how and when this strategy will be implemented.

The Western Weir Strategy was the subject of discussion in the New South Wales Parliament last week and Councillors are looking forward to the briefing on the Strategy which will be provided by Minister Pavey's Office over the next few weeks.

Council at the Meeting on Monday resolved to execute the Deed with Infrastructure New South Wales for funding of \$1,350,000.00 which will be supplemented by \$450,000.00 from the Bourke Water Fund Reserve to allow the construction of a new reservoir to replace the Charles Street Reservoir which is coming to the end of its economic life.

On the agenda of Monday's Council meeting was the receipt of the Annual Financial Reports and Auditor's Reports for the 2018/2019 Financial Year.

Council's auditors were able to join the meeting via teleconference to give a brief overview of the Audit.

The Audit showed that Council is in a very healthy financial position and meeting the majority of the benchmarks set to measure the performance of Councils.

Council did not meet the benchmarks for own source revenue which is not unusual for rural Councils who have a strong reliance on grant funds. With Council receiving a considerable level of grant funding it was not surprising that this benchmark was not met. Rural Councils in remote areas such as Bourke also have difficulty in meeting the benchmarks for outstanding rates where the low land values and a number of vacant blocks adversely impacting on the ability to collect rates in some instances and even the sale of these properties to recover the outstanding rates generally doesn't result in the outstanding amounts being recovered.

I would like to congratulate all members of the finance team and others involved in the preparation of the Financial Reports on a job well done and to be one of the first in the state to submit the reports is a great effort particularly for such a small Council.

Quote of the week!

"The key to success is to focus on goals, not obstacles".

Ross Earl
General Manager