



“From the GM’s Desk”

30th APRIL 2020



BACK O’ BOURKE UPGRADE

Work is continuing with the upgrade to the administration office and displays at the Back O’ Bourke Exhibition Centre. The structural component of the project is now complete with this including the extension of Building One comprising of additional retail space, offices and a small cafeteria. The lining and fit out of the building will continue over the coming weeks with the completion expected by the end of June. The upgrade to the displays in Building One is also progressing well and when completed will bring new elements to the Exhibition Centre.

The area outside the back of Building One will also include a paved area and deck where customers and visitors alike can sit and relax with a coffee and enjoy the ambiance of the garden and the facility once we have had an opportunity to complete plantings and revive the grassed area when the builders have completed their works.

CBD UPGRADES

Stage One of the Main Street Upgrade Project is in the final phase, with completion of the planting of the garden beds and the additional features that will be added to the seating spaces, being imminent. Prior to Easter, Council staff planted a number of flowers to beautify the area but further planting of additional colour and trees is to take place in the not too distant future. The final piece of paving in Sturt Street beside the Newsagency, will be completed in the coming weeks.

Work has commenced on the upgrade to Mitchell Street with a survey plan of the area and scoping of the design expected to be available by the end of June for community consultation. This work will include an upgrade to the wharf area, beautification in Mitchell Street from the Wharf to Central Park, upgrade to the Cenotaph area and finalisation of the Poets’ Corner. Once all work is completed the town centre will be a welcoming attraction to visitor and locals alike.

ANZAC DAY SERVICES

The town of Bourke responded to the call to commemorate ANZAC DAY despite the fact that the traditional commemorations including the Dawn Service, March and Morning Service were unable to be held due to the COVID-19 related restrictions imposed on both movement and gatherings.

The initiative of the Local RSL and Radio Station 2WEB to put together both a Dawn Service and Morning Service is to be applauded. Not only did the broadcast reach the people within Bourke Shire, but it also reached the entire listening area of 2WEB. All residents across this wide area were no doubt appreciative of the opportunity to pay their respects to those who served in the various conflicts across the globe.

Whilst the commemoration took place in a vastly different fashion to normal services, the significance ANZAC DAY was in no way diminished.

Pipe Bands Australia encouraged all pipers across the nation to continue the tradition of the ANZAC Day tribute of thanks and respect to those who have served in times of war and peace.

At 11.00am on ANZAC Day, pipers were asked to kit up as usual and play Amazing Grace - in their home, in the front or back yard or at another location that complies with all government health directives and advice at the time. This ANZAC Day initiative was taken up by the Royal New Zealand Pipe Band Association whilst in Australia, Pipe Bands Australia collaborated with the organisers of the 6.00am Buglers Across Australia, keeping the music coming and preserving support to veterans and commemorations into the 21st century.

Annette was very happy to join pipers across both Australia and New Zealand in participating in this special show of support and played "Amazing Grace" on the bagpipes in our driveway. I noticed even in the small area around my residence there were a number of residents who participated in both the Dawn Service and the 11.00am service.

From the reports in the media, there were many people across Australia who commemorated ANZAC DAY in non- traditional ways but with the same degree of respect.

Many followed the services which were broadcast both by television and radio and the two (2) locally produced services broadcast on 2WEB services were certainly very well presented.

LOCAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The Bourke Shire Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC) continues to meet on a regular basis.

The LEMC covers a wide range of issues as result of the outbreak of COVID-19 and a guest at the meeting held last Thursday was Charles Dwyer, Director Educational Leadership, Mitchell Network of the New South Wales Department of Education.

Charles was able to provide the LEMC members with an outline of what a staged return to school would look like. Whilst providing an indication of how the staged return would work, it is difficult at this early stage to identify the exact dates for the introduction of the staged return. Such dates will no doubt be largely dependent on the need for the continued going reduction of cases.

With attendance at school being so important for the ongoing education of children, the fact that if school is not operating many parents will need to make alternative arrangements for the care of their children if they work fulltime, an understanding of the phased return was appreciated by members of the LEMC.

INFORMATION FOR BOURKE RESIDENTS IN RELATION TO COVID-19

One of the initiatives of the Bourke Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC) has been the establishment of a COVID-19 Facebook information page for the Shire.

The purpose of the Facebook page is to provide a single source of up to date information in relation to COVID-19 and its impact on the Bourke Shire community. The Facebook page is titled: Bourke Community COVID-19 Information.

The information is also provided to the community via a link on Councils Website:

<https://bourke.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/>

SUPER ANNUATION FOR COUNCILLORS

The Office of Local Government has issued a discussion paper to seek the views of Councils and their local communities on whether Councillors should receive superannuation payments.

Under the Commonwealth Superannuation Guarantee (Administration) Act 1993, Councils across Australia are not required to make superannuation contributions in relation to the fees they pay to mayors and Councillors. This is because mayors and Councillors are elected to a civic office in a Council and are not employees of the Council.

The release of the discussion paper has been prompted by concerns raised within the Local Government sector that the ineligibility of Councillors to receive superannuation payments is inequitable and is a deterrent to more women and younger people standing as candidates at Council elections.

The discussion paper seeks the views of Councils and others on four (4) options.

The four (4) options can be accessed by the following link and are also contained in an advertisement in the Western Herald

- [Councillor superannuation discussion paper – March 2020 – PDF](#)

Submissions may be made to olg@olg.nsw.gov.au, labelled 'Councillor Superannuation Consultation' and marked to the attention of OLG's Council Governance Team.

Submissions should be made before **COB Friday, 8 May 2020**.

The matter was considered by Bourke Shire Council at its meeting held on Monday, 27th April where it was resolved that the status quo should be maintained.

SEMINAR FOR BUSINESSES IMPACTED BY COVID-19

The Business Webinar for Bourke Businesses organised by Bourke Shire Council in conjunction with Regional Development Australia-Orana held last Thursday afternoon was hailed as a success with some 40 people participating.

The Webinar was facilitated by Megan Dixon, Director of Regional Development with RDA Orana who was joined by Dubbo Business Specialists, Andrew Rose from Business DNA, Cherie Forrester from Seed HR and Sean Finn from Regional New South Wales based in Broken Hill.

The presenters spoke on a range of initiatives that have been put in place by both the State and Federal Governments and the eligibility criteria to access these initiatives.

These include a Small Business Support grant of \$10,000 from the NSW Government and the JobKeeper subsidy of \$1500 per fortnight available from the Federal Government.

A range of pertinent questions were raised from the participants and subsequently addressed by the presenters or where they were unable to give a definitive answer they gave an undertaking to respond later.

Presenters encouraged participants to take the time to check their eligibility to access the funding and the need for the local economy, as a whole, to embrace the initiatives.

With current restrictions impacting on many businesses, it is critical that announced funding to assist in retain jobs and boost the local economy are fully understood and businesses access the funding streams.

Regional Development Australia (RDA) has made available summaries and links to websites regarding all forms of the COVID-19 assistance packages.

HISTORIC COUNCIL MEETING

In late March 2020, the NSW Minister for Health and Medical Research, the Hon. Brad Hazzard MP, issued the Public Health (COVID-19 Gatherings) Order 2020, restricting gatherings in indoor spaces exceeding 100 persons.

Council meetings were not exempted from the order as “*essential gatherings*”.

Accordingly, changes were required as to how all Councils in NSW conducted their meetings.

To this end, amendments were made to the Local Government Act allowing Councils to meet remotely to manage the risk of transmission of the COVID-19 virus and to ensure compliance with the Public Health Order.

The amendments mean that for an initial period of six (6) months, Councillors can participate in meetings by Audio-Visual Link instead of attending in person.

Councils meeting on Monday this week was the first time in the history of Local Government in Bourke, to my knowledge, where decisions of Council were made where Councillors were not sitting in the same room.

Councillors and staff are to be congratulated on embracing the amendments in the Act with all Councillors who participated in Monday’s meeting doing so from locations remote from the Council Chamber.

COMMISSIONING OF DESALINATION PLANT

The desalination plant funded by the NSW Government as a result of the significant water shortages faced by Bourke over the past twelve months has been constructed and is due to be trialled early next week commencing on Monday, 4 May 2020 and likely to be operational until 8 May 2020. The desalination plant will be utilising water from both Walkden’s and Stoneyrise bore supplies.

This water will be used for the town filtered water supply for this trial period in what will be an historic day for Bourke and its water supply.

With the river flowing, and a further rise expected this week, it is sometimes easy to forget just how dire the situation was in Bourke with the town at one stage identified as one of the towns in New South Wales most likely to run out of water.

Council, and indeed the community, were most fortunate and very appreciative of the fact that the NSW Government provided significant funding to complete a number of emergency bores to ensure that a water supply for the town was maintained.

The water from these bores, however, did have slightly elevated sodium levels which although outside Australian Drinking Water Guidelines was deemed safe to drink by health authorities.

With concerns raised by some people regarding the elevated sodium levels, the NSW Government again came to the aid of Bourke Shire and the Bourke Community and provided funding for a desalination plant which, as I said, will be commissioned next week.

It is expected that the desalination plant will provide water for the town at a level of 150mg/l of sodium content with the water from the bores natural sodium level being 330mg/l. The Australian Drinking Water Guidelines (ADWG) for sodium is below 180mg/l.

Once commissioned the town will return to the river supply and the desalination plant will be “mothballed” until needed for the next drought or when the river runs low.

The desalination plant will need a monthly flush from the bores to protect and clean membranes that remove the sodium from the water. This flush however will have no effect on the towns water supply and it is important that the expenditure on the bores and the desalination plant are protected by this monthly maintenance regime.

ROAD CONSTRUCTION

Main Road 404 (Bourke to Hungerford) reconstruction project, east of Fords Bridge, continues to take shape in readiness for bitumen sealing with the residents who utilise this stretch of road ready to notice a marked difference once it is completed.

Council has sought funding to continue the works so that the bitumen seal is able to go all the way into Fords Bridge.

Due to the beautiful rain received in March, it was necessary for various local roads to be closed to traffic. The majority of these roads have now been able to be re-opened.

Council Roads Officers are inspecting all roads regularly with the aim of opening the local roads as fast as possible having regard of course for public safety.

There are still a few places that are just far too wet to either inspect or get a grader do the repairs necessary before being able to safely open these roads and I ask that residents be patient in this regard.

I would also ask that all road users exercise extra caution when passing through road works, so we don't endanger those involved on the worksite undertaking the maintenance of these roads as Council looks to make them safe for all road users.

SHOWGROUND GRANTS

The NSW Government has announced that they would be making \$25 million in funding to upgrade some of the showgrounds across New South Wales.

The grants were announced on the 16 April 2020 with applications being required to be lodged by 24 April 2020. As such there was an emphasis on shovel ready projects as the Government is keen to stimulate local economies.

Council convened an urgent meeting of the JB Renshaw Sporting Complex User Group Advisory Committee on Tuesday 21 April 2020 to ensure that any project submitted met with the agreement of all user groups.

Two (2) projects were identified as shovel ready. These projects were for a new toilet block, with the current block deemed well passed its use by date, and for the installation of an underground automatic watering system. This project had previously been submitted for funding under another funding program and as such much of the detail was already available.

Both Projects were deemed worthy of funding with both being submitted with the new toilet block being given the first priority.

Grants for the showground improvements will be allocated in two (2) phases. As mentioned applications for the first phase closed on 24 April 2020 with applications for the second phase closing on the 29 May 2020.

If successful, these grants will see an overall improvement in the amenity of the JB Renshaw Sporting Complex which has seen increased usage over the past few years.

Quote of the week!

"We all have battles to fight. And it's often in those battles that we are most alive: it's on the frontlines of our lives that we earn wisdom, create joy, forge friendships, discover happiness, find love, and do purposeful work."

Eric Greitens

Ross Earl
General Manager