



“From the GM’s Desk”

10th September 2020



COVID-19

The presence of COVID-19 continues to have a significant impact on our everyday lives compared to what we have previously deemed normal. Restrictions in relation to attendance at events and travel are markedly different to what we experienced pre-COVID with state borders continuing to be closed and international travel basically non-existent.

Whilst many regions throughout Australia have been fortunate to avoid any COVID cases within their communities, we cannot become complacent and we need to maintain ongoing vigilance in the fight against the potential spread of the virus. The outbreak in Victoria has shown the level of devastation that the virus can create.

I again urge all residents to comply with the guidelines that have been provided by the various health agencies designed to limit the spread of the disease. These include maintaining social distancing and practicing a high level of personal hygiene including the washing of hands regularly.

Bourke Shire Council is coordinating an awareness campaign in association with our neighbouring Councils and NSW Health. 2WEB are producing a series of messages to be broadcast across the region as part of the campaign to maintain a high level of community awareness.

REGIONAL GENERAL MANAGER’S FORUM

I attended a Regional General Manager’s Forum at Narromine last Friday together with Council’s Manager of Corporate Services, Leonie Brown, who will shortly assume my role. The meeting provided the opportunity for region wide Council General Manager’s to exchange ideas and information and build relationships which is an essential element in undertaking the role of General Manager.

The agenda included addresses from Craig Mathews, Acting Director Western, and Jodi McIntyre, Manager, Local Government, both from Transport for New South Wales based in Parkes and Ian Smith, Director - Office of Regional Economic Development from Dubbo. All speakers provided excellent presentations and their addresses were much appreciated by all in attendance.

Prior to the establishment of the Joint Organisation of Councils, regular meetings of the General Managers Advisory Committee for the Orana Regional Organisation of Councils (OROC) were a valued forum and one, which resulted in significant benefit both from a financial perspective as well as the professional development of all who attended.

The current format of the Regional Forums is not restricted to any particular JO and General Managers of all Councils are invited irrespective of their membership of a JO or not.

On the evening prior to the meeting, a dinner was held for both Glenn Wilcox, the General Manager of Warren and myself as we will both be retiring prior to the end of October and as such the meeting last week was the last we would each be attending as General Managers.

The group of General Managers across the Orana Region have always been extremely supportive of each other and happy to assist one another. This support is particularly valuable when taking up a General Managers role for the first time.

MUNGINDI FIRE

Bourke Shire Council reached out to Moree Plains Shire Council last week offering its support following a fire, which destroyed the local supermarket, butchers' shop and clothing store in the North West border community of Mungindi. Interestingly Mungindi straddles both the NSW/Queensland border with those who live south of the river being NSW residents whilst those residing in the northern part of town being Queensland residents. Whilst the issue of losing any commercial premise in a remote community is bad enough, the matter has been made substantially worse with residents not able to travel to their next closest grocery store because it is outside the border COVID bubble.

Mungindi sits within the Queensland Government's COVID bubble, with those Queensland residents who live north of the river not able to travel to the closest town, Moree, without needing to quarantine on return, as Moree is outside the bubble.

CROSS BORDER ISSUES

The cross-border issues being experienced at Mungindi are very real and are but one (1) example of the many issues effecting communities on both sides of the NSW/Queensland border. Last week, Bourke Shire Mayor, Barry Hollman and staff attended a video teleconference organised by LGNSW President, Linda Scott, for those NSW Councils whose northern boundaries end at the Queensland border.

Presenters to the teleconference were the NSW Police Commissioner, Mick Fuller, and NSW Cross Border Commissioner, James McTavish. It was interesting to hear of some of the issues being faced by border Councils. What was very evident from the discussions was the frustration by border communities at the requirements of the Queensland Government in respect of their quarantine requirements which are impacting so many lives in areas that are not COVID hotspots.

ESSENTIAL ENERGY

The Mayor and I met via video teleconference with officers from Essential Energy last week to discuss their operations in Bourke. It has been some time since we have had the opportunity to meet with Essential Energy who are such important service providers to our region in terms of electricity supply and infrastructure. We spoke of the need to maintain a workforce in Bourke that is sufficient to ensure timely repairs and maintenance across the region along with our desire to see apprentices employed in Bourke to bolster ongoing skills in the region. Such like meetings are important to ensure Council maintains an ongoing relationship with this important service provider.

PLAQUE TO ACKNOWLEDGE STOLEN GENERATION

In a previous column, I advised that Transport for New South Wales was planning to erect a plaque at the Bourke Railway Station to acknowledge the Stolen Generation. TfNSW have already installed a memorial plaque at Sydney's Central Station, on the main concourse adjacent to Platform 1, and are now erecting plaques at eight (8) regional stations that have been identified as significant by the Stolen Generations Organisations, with Bourke being one (1) of those selected

The plaque was to be unveiled this month; however, unveiling was deferred in light of the current pandemic situation. The unveiling date has now been advised as 9 February 2021.

Further details will be provided closer to the date as they become available. Transport for New South Wales are coordinating the event but have also been keen to have input from the local community and Council.

RALLY EVENT VISITORS TO BOURKE

I am aware of two (2) “rally” type events, which will have stopovers in Bourke in coming months with the events now contained within New South Wales due to the COVID border closures. The rallies provide an injection of funds into the local towns they pass through and quite often leave behind donations to local groups.

UPCOMING SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

The upcoming school holiday period is expected to see an increase in visitation to many sections of regional and remote New South Wales as urban area residents look to these locations as destinations.

Many traditional destinations are no longer an option for these people who are keen to explore our great nation and are looking at options within our own state and the iconic status of Bourke sees it on the “bucket list” of many people.

MURRAY DARLING BASIN

The Final Report of the Murray Darling Basin’s Socio-Economic Assessment Panel has now been made publicly available by the Minister for Resources, Water and Regional Australia the Hon. Keith Pitt, MP.

For information, following is an extract from the report:-

“The Final Report, including 22 recommendations, calls for a change of approach in Basin communities and significant and sustained investment in rural and regional communities across the Murray Darling. It is focused on the future and the need for successive Governments to support, consult and engage with communities to help address the unequal distributional impacts of water reform and to help rebuild this region.

The seven-member Independent Panel’s focus throughout the research and review process was to engage expert, industry and community stakeholders to inform our Final Report and ensure clarity of purpose and next steps for Government.

A two-tiered priority approach recommends the critical need for investment to rebuild resilience and diversity in conjunction with the slowing pace of planned water recovery expenditure. This dual approach gives communities both the space and opportunity to address pressing instances of distress, to find and embed positive strategies for economic development, and to take stock of the ecological responses given their lags and the impact of drought in many parts of the Basin.

We are pleased to provide you with the following:

- 1. The Final Report – the full report and recommendations.*
 - 2. A Summary of the Final Report – including the recommendations, introduction and terms of reference.*
 - 3. Technical Summary – an overview of the technical work commissioned by the Panel*
- For more Information on the Basin Socio-Economic Assessment Panel’s research and review process, please visit - <https://www.basin-socio-economic.com.au/>”*

QUOTE OF THE WEEK!

“Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today.”

Malcolm X

Ross Earl
General Manager