



“From the GM’s Desk”

1st October 2020



BOURKE SHIRE MAYORAL ELECTION:

The elections for the positions of Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Bourke Shire were held in conjunction with the Council meeting of 28th September 2020 which resulted in Councillor Barry Hollman being re-elected as Mayor for a fifth term and Councillor Lachlan Ford being re-elected Deputy Mayor for a similar period. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, the general election to elect a new Council has been deferred until September 2021. Barry and Lachlan’s term as Mayor and Deputy respectively is for the 12-month period ending September 2021, when the new Council is ultimately elected.

MAYORAL ELECTIONS IN SURROUNDING COUNCILS:

In the Mayoral elections for surrounding Shires, I note that Councillor Lillian Brady has been re-elected as Mayor of Cobar for another twelve months with Peter Abbott returned as her Deputy. Councillor Ray Donald was also returned in Bogan Shire as was Councillor Glen Neil in the role of Deputy Mayor. Councillor Phillip O’Connor was returned at Brewarrina Shire; however, Brewarrina have a new Deputy Mayor in Councillor Vivian Slack-Smith.

At Walgett Shire, Councillor Ian Woodcock has replaced Manuel Martinez as Mayor with Councillor Martinez now Deputy Mayor replacing Councillor Woodcock in that role.

FLOW IN THE RIVER:

The flow in the river remains good with the river at 4.12 metres as at last weekend.

There is a Green alert for Blue-green algae at the Bourke Boat Ramp.

The advices in relation to Blue-Green Algae provide the following information in relation to a GREEN ALERT:

Blue-green algae occur naturally at low numbers. At these concentrations, algae would not normally be visible, however some species may affect taste and odour of water even at low numbers and does not pose any problems for recreational, stock or household use.

ANNUAL FINANCIAL REPORTS:

Council’s Auditor will present its Audit Report to Council at the October Ordinary Meeting of Council to be held on 26th October 2020.

Council is again expecting a positive audit report with Council meeting or exceeding most benchmarks with the exception of those relating to own-source revenue and the level of outstanding rates.

Bourke Shire Council has always experienced a higher than industry average in respect of its outstanding rates and charges. In addition, and like many Councils in rural New South Wales, Bourke Shire has a high reliance on external funding sources such as operating grants and contributions and as such finds it extremely difficult in meeting the benchmark of 60% as identified by the Audit Office. This ratio has also been impacted by the fact that Council has been successful in attracting a high level of grant funding over the past five years, with such funding being obviously welcome.

EXTENSION OF COVID-19 LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (EMERGENCY MEASURES) BILL 2020):

The NSW government has retained COVID-19 legislative amendments (as per the COVID-19 Legislation Amendment (Emergency Measures) Bill 2020) and emergency orders until 25 March 2021, which will continue to influence essential services delivered by councils.

- The Local Government (General) Regulation 2005 amendments allow councillors and staff to continue to attend meetings by audio-visual links. Council and committee meetings that exclude the public must be livestreamed and those that include the public must permit four square metres of space for each person attending.
- The Minister for Planning and Public Spaces also retains Planning powers that include the power to make an order for development to be carried out without the normal planning approval. Changes to the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 relate to construction work, temporary cycle ways, flexibility for food trucks and dark kitchens, retail trading operating hours including 24-hour delivery and waste removal, home businesses, public inspection of planning documents and timing of infrastructure contributions payments have been extended.

The extension of the period of the Bill is a very good indication that the impact from the pandemic are far from over and that all communities should maintain vigilance to reduce the possibility of the spread.

ROADWORKS:

Another 6kms of seal was applied on the Wanaaring Road last week, with another 6kms anticipated to be ready for seal in another two (2) weeks.

Graders are making their way across from Enngonia to Yantabulla with the plan being to grade Hungerford to Bourke Road in the coming weeks, followed by the roads around Fords Bridge which will be getting a maintenance grade.

The wonderful rain event the weekend before last, whilst extremely welcome, necessitated the closure of all unsealed roads with the Shire.

For most of our road users, the need for road closures is readily understood and they work around it, knowing that the council will re-open all roads as soon as staff can inspect the roads and deem the impacted road(s) in question safe for all to use. With Council being responsible for just under 2000kms of unsealed road, it takes time to cover such a large network and make an informed decision on the condition of the roads.

Unfortunately, some of the road users either don't understand or don't care if the road is open or not irrespective of the amount of rain. When vehicles travel on wet roads they can cause considerable damage, which not only makes the road unsafe until the council can repair the damage but also incurs a considerable cost.

This has a flow-on effect to the limited unsealed road maintenance budget, so some road might miss out on routine maintenance or repairs that are needed simply because of the selfish attitude of a few people.

The damage to the road surface is magnified by heavy vehicles and those utilising four-wheel drive.

DAVIDSON AND COOLICAN OVAL FENCING:

Work has been finalised on the fencing around Coolican Oval and by the time this column goes to print the fence around Davidson Oval will also be completed.

The Contractors from Tamworth are certainly efficient and have done a good job in a very short timeframe.

The new fencing provides both additional security for the Oval Complex as well as enhancing the visual appearance of the number one sporting complex within the town. These works complete the work planned for both ovals in the short term. The refurbishment of the Bourke War Memorial Swimming Pool in the same precinct, is now expected to be completed by mid December.

Funding was provided under the Stronger Country Communities program and Council is extremely grateful for the level of funding it has received under the program and the resultant benefits that have resulted across the shire area.

OCTOBER - A MONTH OF STAFF CHANGES:

There will be a number of staff changes at Bourke Shire over the next few weeks. Asset Management Officer, Charlotte Finch, is leaving Council and moving to South Australia. Matthew McCorkle, Councils Engineering Technical Officer is leaving the Organisation to join the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. I thank each of these staff members for their contribution to Council and the community and wish them well for their future endeavours. I will be retiring from Council on 12th October 2020 with this being my penultimate column.

TREE PRUNING BY ESSENTAL ENERGY:

Essential Energy will commence the pruning of tress under power lines in Bourke this week. In their advices to Council, Essential Energy have indicated that they utilise directional pruning techniques that remove branches growing towards a power line and encourage re-growth away from the power network.

Whilst this can affect visual amenity, these techniques are considered best practice through the arboriculture industry and are used by most power companies in Australia.

The visual amenity in Bourke has been disrupted by this technique in the past and unfortunately there is no guarantee that this won't be the case with this round of pruning.

Notwithstanding this reality, a meeting between Council officers and Essential Energy and their contractor was held earlier in the week, prior to commencement, to ensure all parties are on the same page and have similar levels of understanding on was the finished job will look like.

The convening of the meeting was seen as a positive move and will hopefully result in the pruning works not attracting the same level of adverse comment which has previously occurred.

Essential Energy notes that trees coming into contact with overhead power lines pose serious hazards to people, wildlife and the surrounding environment, with the potential for bushfires, damage to property, injury and unplanned power outages.

SPORT AND RECREATION ADMINISTRATION FORUM:

Last Thursday night Mark Horton, Regional Coordinator – Western, NSW Office of Sport facilitated a meeting involving representatives of sporting groups within Bourke and District to look at ways in which to improve, volunteering experience, and streamlining administration of the sporting groups, including increasing the number of Active Kids Vouchers accessed in the Shire, noting that the State Government provides all students with \$100 dollar voucher twice a year to assist with registration fees, an amount equalling \$98,000 for the Bourke Shire LGA if all vouchers are redeemed.

In addition to Mark, the Office of Sport was also represented by Ronnie Gibbs well known ex Bourke resident and frequent visitor to Bourke as well as Murray Newham, Project Officer – Far West and Kris Stevens, Administration Officer - Far West, being the whole team.

During two (2) forums held in 2017, a priority listing for the improvements of sporting facilities in the Shire was established and as previously reported most of these have been achieved or are in the process of construction which includes the pool. There were nearly 40 people present at the meeting and all acknowledged the improvement the sporting and recreational facilities within the Shire since that final meeting in 2017 including:-

- War Memorial Pool Upgrade
- New Lighting at both Coolican and Davison Oval
- New Fencing around the sporting Complex including the Pool, PCYC, Davidson and Coolican Ovals
- New Canteen facilities at Davidson Oval
- New Toilets at Renshaw Oval
- New Watering System at Renshaw Oval
- New Fence around the Tennis Courts
- Toilets in Central Park
- New Cricket Pitch at North Bourke Oval
- Upgrade of the Bourke Community Centre
- The building of a spectator facility at Fords Bridge
- New Fencing around Louth Oval

The meetings in 2017 highlighted the need for improvement in the training of both administrators and coaches and this is the next phase of the overall improvement of sport in Bourke.

One of the solutions identified, at last week's meeting, was perhaps for a number of sport and recreation groups to come together under a single sport administration structure, with club administrators, volunteers and players all gaining benefit from a more cost effective and streamlined arrangement.

For instance, if there are approx. 500 eligible children in Bourke to receive the \$200.00 per year for registration, that is \$98,000 annually that can be administered centrally and utilised by all sports, there are other avenues of funding also available. It may take some setting up, but it will be worth the effort.

COVID-19 Update:

There is no doubt that 2020 has been a tough year. With the relaxation of COVID rules more and more people are taking the opportunity to take a holiday to recharge. Already we are seeing high numbers of visitors to Bourke. These numbers are expected to increase with the school holidays.

Whether you are going away or welcoming friends and relatives, it's vital you keep doing what works to protect the community, so please stick to the rules. Remember to handwash and physically distance by

staying 1.5m from others. If you're somewhere that makes it hard to stay 1.5m from others, wear a mask.

If you're feeling unwell, don't travel - stay home and get tested.

PROPOSED OPENING DATE OF POOL

The contractors are working as quickly as possible on the project and as previously advised we are looking to have the pool open in Mid- December.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK!

"Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence wins' championships".

Michael Jordan

Ross Earl
General Manager