



“From the Acting GM’s Desk”

15 October 2020



Ross Earl:

As regular readers of this column would be aware, last weeks “From the GM’s Desk” column was Ross Earls last, with Ross retiring from Council this week after 8 years at the helm at Bourke Shire Council.

This week is my first column as Acting General Manager and I will be in this role until February 2021.

Ross’s retirement from full time employment is the culmination of a 44-year association with Local Government in NSW which commenced in February 1976 when he took up a role as Administrative Clerk at Murrumbidgee Shire Council in Darlington Point in south west NSW.

During his career, Ross held positions at eight (8) General Purpose Councils and one (1) County Council, that being the Cudgegong (Abattoir) County Council. He also provided consultancy services to various Councils for a period of seven (7) years from January 2000 until September 2007 in the areas of governance, Work, Health and Safety and administrative procedures and compliance.

Much was achieved by Ross during his time as General Manager at Bourke Shire Council. A quick snapshot of some of his successes as General Manager include:

- Lobbying and achieving funding to “drought proof” Bourke’s water supply such that the NSW Government funded the installation of a series of water bores and relating infrastructure and also funded the construction of a new \$12m Water Treatment Plant.
- Developing a strategic list of “shovel” ready projects to take advantage of significant levels of grant funding from State and Federal Governments.
- Sourcing funding for the redevelopment of the 50-metre pool at the Bourke War Memorial Olympic Pool.
- Following canvassing by Ross, the NSW Premier decided to hold what was ultimately a very successful Cabinet Meeting in Bourke; a first for a remote locality in the State.
- Achieving grant funding to undertake the reconstruction and sealing of important transport links, such as the Bourke-Wanaaring Road, that five (5) ago, the sealing of such roadways, were but a distant dream.
- Actively involved with government agencies in working towards better outcomes for the socially disadvantaged in Bourke.
- Actively involved in Local Government affairs in general whilst displaying a very strong knowledge of the industry that is Local Government and the important role it plays within respective communities.

Bourke Council at its meeting held on 28 September 2020 resolved that Ross be thanked for his outstanding contribution to Council during his term as General Manager and further, that Council wish both Ross and his wife Annette a long and happy retirement. I join with the Council in thanking Ross and wishing him and Annette all the very best for the future.

HEALTH CONCERNS:

Council has been active in recent weeks advocating on behalf of the Bourke community, raising concerns at a Request for Tender (RFT) issued by the Western NSW Local Health District (WNSWLHD) which invites the medical fraternity to submit a tender to provide Visiting Medical Officer (VMO) Services to varying Multipurpose Services, including the Bourke Multipurpose Service.

The tender provides for a minimum VMO coverage at the Bourke Service being on-site over five (5) days, from 8.00am – 6.00pm. Outside of this, tenderers have to identify how they will provide coverage, with the RFT stating that proposals 'will be considered for virtual care service options in addition to the minimum on site/on call days' ”.

The Mayor of Bourke, Councillor Barry Hollman, in a Media Release on the issue, noted that “should a tender for such minimum level of service be accepted, this would mean that for only five (5) days a week and for 10 hours of each of these days, a doctor would be available at the Bourke Multipurpose Service.” Mr Mayor further noted that “outside of these periods, being five (5) days a week 14 hours a day and 2 x 24-hour days, only a virtual doctor would be available to service what would generally be accident and emergency patients.”

If minimum service levels were to be enacted, face to face doctors would only be available 30% of a full week with the remaining 70% being a 'virtual care service option. This is of great concern.

The Mayor has called on the Health Service to cancel the current tender process and to visit the various communities the subject of the tender and meet with residents and explain the issues and discuss the various options.

I will keep residents updated as to progress or otherwise in respect of this important of matters in future publications of this Column.

OCTOBER LONG WEEKEND:

The October long weekend, the school holidays and the community's general ability to travel throughout NSW following the relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions, has seen significant numbers of tourists having visited Bourke and surrounds in recent times. Councils road construction crews have commented on the number of caravan towing vehicles passing through the current roadworks on the Bourke-Wanaaring Rd. Closer to town, it is pleasing to see trips on the PV Jandra running at passenger capacity, caravan parks near full and the Back o' Bourke Centre being absolutely inundated with tourists each and every day. I say thank you to all involved in servicing tourists to Bourke for their positivity as they assist our visitors with their knowledge and enthusiasm. Tourism is such important industry in our community and the numbers in the past months remind us of this very clearly.

ANNUAL FINANCIAL REPORTS:

Ross spoke last week of the completion of the annual audit of Councils Annual Financial Statements for 2019/2020. Further to this, it is advised that the NSW Audit Office will present a summary of its Audit Report to Council at the Council meeting to be held on 26 October 2020. This report will be presented by audio-visual link.

At this point it would appear that the Council Meeting will again be restricted to Councillors and staff only, due to COVID gathering restrictions. Members of the public are encouraged to join the meeting via the live streaming facility and hear from the Auditors in respect of Councils solid financial position.

BOURKE WAR MEMORIAL OLYMPIC SWIMMING POOL:

Works continues on the Olympic pool upgrade to be completed for everyone use this summer. The Splash Pad at the Pool opened to the public on the weekend, numbers will be restricted as part of the Pools COVID Safety Plan. Details of the opening hours will be available on Facebook – go to the “Bourke Pool” page as hours may vary.

COUNCIL WORKING CLOSELY WITH ESSENTIAL ENERGY:

As previously advised, and as part of Essential Energy’s regular program of tree trimming works, Essential Energy agreed to:

- Remove dead trees from under the power lines;
- Institute a programmed tree removal strategy involving both Essential Energy and Council, which has now commenced, including removing unsightly/unsuitable trees from under high voltage power lines; and
- Replaced trees removed with a suitable tree from Councils tree list.

Trees in Sturt St, at the corner of Sturt and Hope St and on the Mitchell Highway were identified for removal due to either being dead or being an unsuitable tree species under the power line with Essential Energy removing the tree and debris with Council then responsible for the removal of the tree stumps. Essential Energy have also agreed to assist in providing some suitable replacements.

LIBRARY HISTORICAL COLLECTION

The Library has recently been compiling information on those from Bourke who served in WWII. If you have any information that you are willing to share, please contact Jodi at the Library. A slideshow has been made for WWI, and this slideshow can be viewed by visiting the Library’s Facebook page at bpl@bourkelibrary.com.au

The Library is most interested in adding material to their local historical collection. If you have any photos or documents in relation to the history of our town and district that you are willing to share, contact the Library so that arrangements can be made for the copying of the items.

Murray-Darling Association:

The CEO of the Murray-Darling Association (MDA), Emma Bradbury, will be in Bourke on Monday, 19 and Tuesday, 20 October 2020 to meet with Council and community members. Ms. Bradbury will be touring the western regions of the Barwon Darling to discuss development of an agreed standard for community consultation, and a role for Local Government in Basin policy and decision-making processes.

Brendan Murphy, Director of Regional Engagement – Northern Basin with the Office of the Inspector-General MDB Water Resources, will also be in town with the MDA, and is also keen to meet with community members to discuss local and regional issues.

Community members wishing to meet with either Ms Bradbury or Mr Murphy are requested to contact the Association direct as follows: P: (03) 5480 3805 or E: e.bradbury@mda.asn.au

COVID-19:

We all probably heard that US President, Donald Trump, on his impending release last week from hospital where he was being treated for Coronavirus, had tweeted “Don’t be afraid of COVID. Don’t let it dominate your life”. I would follow on from previous advice from Ross and again warn against complacency in respect of the virus.

Again, the best techniques to avoid the virus are:

- Practice social distancing and staying 1.5 metres away from other people at all times;
- Ensure that you comply with any limits on the numbers of persons in a venue at the one time in accordance with the one person per 4 square metre rule;
- Don't share eating utensils or drinks;
- Don't shake hands but utilise other methods of greeting;
- Practice good personal hygiene including washing your hands regularly, particularly when you get home;
- If you display any symptoms of the virus seek medical advice; and
- Don't go to work, or go out, if you are unwell.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK!

I understand that readers enjoyed Ross's "Quote of the Week" so I will continue to do the same. This week I will provide a quote with Ross's departure from Council and Bourke in mind.

"So long, partner"

Toy story 3

Leonie Brown
Acting General Manager