



**BOURKE  
SHIRE  
COUNCIL**

**“From the Acting General Manager’s Desk”**

**10 December 2020**

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**PROVISION OF HEALTH SERVICES:**

In the company of the Bourke Mayor, Councillor Barry Hollman, along with representatives of our fellow Far North West Joint Organisation (FNWJO) members of Cobar and Walgett, we recently attended a teleconference with the NSW Minister for Health, the Hon. Brad Hazzard, MP and others from NSW Health to discuss our concerns regarding the recent health services tender which involved the provision of Doctors for the Bourke Multipurpose Service.

At the outset both the Mayor and I must acknowledge the Minister for his receptiveness to the request from the Joint Organisation for a meeting. We acknowledge that the Minister’s time is generally at a premium, however, that is currently more so given the ever-evolving pressures from commitments relating to COVID-19. The number of days where the Minister has not been in attendance with the Premier at a COVID related media conference are few and far between and one can only imagine the number of COVID related meetings he has attended.

Whilst the outcome of the tender is looking positive for health services in Bourke and other western communities, it was considered important that the meeting proceed, even though the tender outcome had been announced. It was a positive meeting, and I am certain that better lines of communication between the Local Health District and the Councils present and the communities they represent, will be the outcome.

This week, Mark Spittal, Acting Executive Officer of the Local Health District, and a team of people from the successful tenderer, Ochre Health, will be in Bourke as part of the transition process as Ochre Health moves towards being in-situ and providing health services at Bourke come 1 March 2021.

**AIR SERVICES TO BOURKE:**

Throughout the COVID Pandemic, AirLink have continued to provide air services to Bourke. Whilst passenger activity has been limited during this difficult time, at a recent meeting of the Far North West Joint Organisation, of which Bourke Council is a member, it was agreed to both amend the flight schedule and amend the fare structure.

Effective 7 December 2020 return flights between Dubbo and Bourke will occur each Monday, Thursday and Friday. There will be three (3) fare levels being \$150, \$250 and \$350 with the lowest fare being the community fare for Bourke residents. This is keen pricing, and it is hoped that these fares attract a greater level of passenger activity. Check out further details at: [www.airlinkairlines.com.au](http://www.airlinkairlines.com.au)

The World Bank, who is one of the world's largest sources of funding and knowledge for developing countries, has recognised that "Air transport is an important enabler to achieving economic growth and development. Air transport facilitates integration into the global economy and provides vital connectivity on a national, regional, and international scale. It helps generate trade, promote tourism, and create employment opportunities".

Just as the World Bank recognises the importance of air transport, so too does Bourke Shire Council and the NSW State Government, who is significantly subsidising the flights to assist all in the community. All parties continue to work hard to make the Dubbo – Bourke air route work.

#### **FINAL COUNCIL MEETING OF 2020:**

The final monthly meeting of Bourke Shire Council for 2020 will be held on Monday 14 December 2020 commencing at 9.15am.

Whilst the four (4) square metre rule has been relaxed the 1.5m distance rule is still applicable. Accordingly the meeting will again be conducted on a face to face basis with the public only being able to participate by following the meeting via a webcast. Councillors have the option not to attend in person but to participate remotely via an Audio-Visual link.

Council has previously resolved that there will be no ordinary meeting in January with the initial scheduled meeting for 2021 being Monday, 22 February 2021. It would be nice to think that by then we will be able to welcome members of the community back into the Chamber to observe Council meetings, however time will ultimately tell.

#### **PV JANDRA:**

The final trip for the 2020 Bourke Riverboat Season took place last Sunday.

From the initial cruise of the year on 29 June 2020 up until last Sunday, 6 December 2020, it was pleasing to see that in excess of 7,200 people took the opportunity to take a ride on the PV (Paddle Vessel) Jandra and experience the Darling River from an on-water perspective. These numbers are significant, especially when COVID restrictions are taken into account, with the COVID Safety Plan only permitting a maximum of 45 passengers on each trip of the Jandra, instead of its normal capacity of 100 passengers.

In declaring the season closed, this was done because of falling tourist numbers given the heat being experienced and the falling river which was reducing the distance between the keel of the Jandra and the floor of the river such that the potential for running aground was becoming high. I look forward to further flows in the river to enable the Jandra to operate a full season next year.

A quick thank you to Captain Allan Bartschy and his crew for the professionalism and customer service shown to our tourists this year. It has been great this year to have the PV Jandra operating once again on the Darling River after the boat previously being on sabbatical due to the lack of water in the River.

#### **COVID-19:**

Restrictions in respect of COVID-19 continue to be relaxed. The Queensland border is once again open, as per normal, with a flurry of activity as people were allowed to travel into Queensland from 1 December 2020 for the first time in some seven (7) months.

From Monday of this week, stand up drinking in licenced premises will be again permissible and venue capacity will double following a major easing of restrictions by the NSW Government. In addition, there will be a no capacity restriction applicable to weddings or funerals, as long as venues abide by the two (2) square metre rule. Gyms and nightclubs however aren't included in the new spacing rules.

Whilst the rates of infection are basically zero in the eastern states of Australia, apart from those travellers returning from overseas, my concern is that as families get together for Christmas and New Year celebrations, and complacency sets in, that people again become infected and the disease starts to spread once again.

Let's not succumb to complacency. Let's remember the COVID-19 best practice techniques. Practice the 1.5m social distancing rule, practice good hygiene, stay at home if you have a fever, runny nose, cough or loss of smell and taste and get tested.

### **INTEREST ON OVERDUE RATES:**

As part of its response to COVID-19, Council at its meeting held on 25 May 2020 adopted a COVID-19 Rates Financial Assistance Policy. Included in this Policy was a provision that Council would not charge any interest on overdue rate instalments that were due on 31 May 2020, 31 August 2020 and 30 November 2020 along with any Water Consumption Charges that fell due during that period.

This moratorium on interest charges applied for the period 1 June 2020 until 31 December 2020.

Accordingly, the moratorium finishes on 31 December 2020 with any rates/water charges outstanding as of 1 January 2021 being subject to an interest charge of 7% on, and from, that date until paid.

In addition to this interest rate moratorium, the Policy also provided for Council to place on hold debt recovery and legal action proceeding's in respect of outstanding rates and charges. Again, this hold comes to a conclusion as of 31 December 2020.

Should residents be experiencing financial difficulties in respect of paying their rates and charges to Council, I encourage them to make contact with Council's Revenue Officer as early as possible to allow suitable repayment arrangements to be made.

### **RIVER FLOWS:**

The first day of summer on 1 December 2020 certainly set the scene for what we may be in for during the next three (3) months with the temperature reaching 47.8 degrees.

The river height gauge at 7.00am on 1 December 2020 was 3.67m. On average, the river level has been dropping by approximately 140mm per day in the last two (2) weeks of November. By the end of Monday, 1 December, the river level had dropped to 3.65 m. This reduction in the level of the river clearly shows what is well known, that evaporation on hot days has a significant impact on the water store within the weir pool.

Once the river level reaches a height of 3.5m, this is the trigger point for the introduction of Level Two (2) Water Restrictions. It is estimated that with no rain and inflows, Level Two (2) Restrictions will commence on or around 12 December.

The main difference between level one (1) and level two (2) restrictions is that the period allowed for watering reduces from two (2) hours each day to one (1) hour each day.

The ongoing dry conditions are of concern. Council will continue to monitor the water supply situation across the shire and looks forward to the ongoing cooperation of residents in complying with the restrictions.

### **BOURKE WAR MEMORIAL SWIMMING POOL:**

A Council staff member was telling me that they had had a conversation with former Bourke resident and builder, Jeff Clifford in Dubbo last weekend. They were talking about the Pool redevelopment with Jeff advising that he had undertaken the concrete work for the pool concourse way back when, when he worked with Wallace and McGee. Jeff said that when he and his co-workers were tying all the reinforced steel together, they had to start work at around 4.00am due to the fact that the heat later in the day made the steel untouchable. No gloves back then! They did a great job on the concourse because as part of the current redevelopment, it certainly took a bit to pull up.

Unfortunately, however, I really can't see the 50m pool at the Bourke War Memorial Swimming Pool being open to the public until the New Year. Whilst this is disappointing to all concerned, I consider the contractors have done a great job given that they faced numerous challenges associated with the project, including COVID.

Despite these challenges, what Council has continuously pushed with the contractor is the need for the pool work to be done well and built to a high standard with no short cuts.

In terms of current works, installation of the liner is progressing well and once this phase is complete the pool will be filled with water. The fitting out of the Filtration Room is complete with drainage and earthworks nearing completion. The final piece of the redevelopment is project commissioning, and the contractors are progressing towards this phase of this exciting project for Bourke residents.

### **ROADWORKS:**

Construction works on the Bourke to Wanaaring Road (MR 405) project, Romani-Wangamanna section, continues, with a further 6kms of bitumen laid down on 24 November.

Shoulder widening is taking place on the Mitchell Highway, between Bourke and Enngonia, which will lead to the sealing of the shoulders to help prevent damage to the road surface.

Top grading is underway on the Coronga Peak Road at Byrock.

Resealing of various town streets in Bourke is due to commence in coming weeks.

### ***Quote of the Week!***

*"From Monday, life will be very different in NSW."*

NSW Premier, Gladys Berejiklian announcing relaxed COVID-19 restrictions in NSW from Monday, 7 December 2020.

Leonie Brown  
Acting General Manager