



**BOURKE
SHIRE
COUNCIL**

“From the General Manager’s Desk” 22 July 2021”

COVID Impacts

As Sydney continues to battle the COVID virus with story after story emerging of people going through hardship, it is easy to forget that the virus is having a significant economic impact on our community as well. As an example, I had a call from a very disappointed Jim Strachan, President of the Louth Turf Club advising that the Louth Races planned for 7 August 2021 had been abandoned for this year. Whilst undoubtedly not an easy decision, it is considered that it is the correct decision in light of the current state of COVID. Running an event such as the Louth Races involves hours and hours of people’s time in getting organised for the event and requires many thousands of dollars to be outlaid for bar and catering expenses. The Louth Races attracts many people to the Shire and the financial “spin off” to the community will be missed again this year. As the Club has said on its Facebook site, though, “2022 will be a triumphant return.” Great to see a positive outlook.

Here in Bourke, from last week, we have seen a drastic downturn in visitor numbers, undoubtedly off the back of travel restrictions in respect of leaving Greater Sydney and calls from the Premiers of Victoria and Queensland urging residents to get home before a hard border lockdown is imposed. This has now come to fruition in respect of the NSW/Victorian border. For the last 6 weeks, some 100 plus visitors a day have attended the Back O’ Bourke Exhibition Centre. Last week, this figure dropped to below 30 visitors a day. That’s quite a reduction. Similarly, the Port of Bourke Hotel has reported a significant reduction in patronage, as have Caravan Parks and so on throughout the community. We are now in a period that is normally Bourke’s Tourist Season and I encourage businesses that are affected to investigate and take advantage of Government COVID Business Packages.

COVID Vaccinations.

Bourke residents who had previously lined up for their 1st dose of the Pfizer vaccination back on Tuesday 22 June or Wednesday 23 June 2021, received their 2nd dose of the vaccine last week at a Western NSW Local Health District Clinic. Those who received their first round of the AstraZenaca vaccine in June will receive their follow up jab in September 2021. Following COVID fragments having being found in the Bourke sewage and the current situation in Sydney, I suspect that those who have already taken the opportunity to get vaccinated are feeling quite good in themselves with a high level of comfort in respect of fighting the virus.

The good news is that the Western NSW Local Health District will be holding further first dose COVID-19 vaccination clinics on Tuesday 24 August and Wednesday 25 August 2021 at the Full Gospel Fellowship Church, cnr Short and Tarcoon Sts, Bourke. On Thursday 26 August 2021, the LHD Clinic is attending Enngonia.

You are eligible for vaccination if you are:

- Aged over 40 years old;
- An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person aged over 16 years old;

- From a recognised vulnerable or priority group and aged over 16 years old.

Details of how to book an appointment at these Western NSW Local Health District clinics will be advised shortly.

If you wish to register for clinics offered by other providers in or near our community, visit the online Eligibility Checker or call Health Direct on 1800 022 222.

Like the previous clinic held in Bourke in June, this is a fantastic service to the Bourke Community by the WNSWLHD. I encourage residents to take advantage of it.

Local Government Elections

The peak body for local government in NSW, LGNSW, has advised member councils that after a recent meeting with the Office of Local Government and the NSW Electoral Commission, COVID-safe Council Elections will proceed on 4 September 2021. There was considerable concern in the industry that due to the COVID outbreak in Sydney that the elections may not proceed.

Changes to State Government regulations, as announced last week, will help support fair, transparent and, above all, safe elections. As part of the changes, voters are able to vote in person, by post or online using iVote if eligible.

The new rules focus on ensuring COVID-safe voting, which allows every eligible member of the community an opportunity to elect the council of their choice through broadening of pre-poll eligibility to all electors, an expansion of postal voting eligibility and making online voting using iVote available to eligible electors.

Further details will be provided on these options in due course.

The amendments also provide scope for restrictions on campaign posters and handing out electoral materials where these restrictions are necessary for public health reasons.

Working at the Federal Election

In preparation for the next federal election, the Australian Electoral Commission maintains a national register of people who are interested in working during such elections. Interestingly, the Commission employs around 80,000 people in over 7,000 polling places across Australia to help deliver federal elections.

The Australian Electoral Commission is currently seeking expressions of interest from people who wish to be considered for work when the next election is called. The work is paid – not voluntary – so you will get paid for working at federal elections and you don't need previous election experience to work at these elections as full training is provided.

If you're interested and for further details, go to the Commissions website: www.aec.gov.au.

Farm Safety Training Week

I was pleased to read that Tocal College, based at Patterson in the Hunter Valley of NSW, will be offering a series of accredited courses aimed at improving farm safety in Bourke from 2-6 August 2021. Tocal College is part of the Tocal Agricultural Centre—a Centre of Excellence within the NSW Department of Primary Industries which has established itself as a leading provider of specialised training to rural industries.

The training courses, as mentioned, are focussed on improving farm safety and include courses relating to Working Safely at Heights, Entering and Working in Confined Spaces, Chainsaw Skills, Farm Workshop and Welding Skills, Chemical Application and Risk Management and WHS. Interestingly, over the five (5) day period that the College is in Bourke, they will be offering a daily course on operating Quad Bikes and Side by Sides as an obvious focus in respect of farm safety.

If you are interested in participating it is suggested that you contact Jayne Wood, Skills Training Coordinator by telephone 02 6763 1285 or email; jayne.wood@dpi.nsw.gov.au

Toorale Water Infrastructure Project

Advice has been received that construction to upgrade water infrastructure on the Boera and Homestead Dams, under the second phase of the Toorale Water Infrastructure Project, will commence on 2 August 2021.

Following the tendering process, the NSW Government awarded the construction contract to Australian infrastructure company, Pensar. Pensar brings experience in water infrastructure work to the project including the recent completion of the Walgett Weir Project.

Last week, trucks delivered the last 700 tonnes of graded rock and precast concrete in preparation for construction.

The NSW Government has advised that the new infrastructure at Boera and Homestead Dams will enable more water to flow to the Darling River, particularly when flows have been low for an extended period, while also ensuring important habitats on Toorale receive water when needed. They have noted that fishways to be constructed as part of the upgrade will increase connectivity and support healthier fish populations in the Warrego and Darling Rivers.

WaterNSW

WaterNSW, who is the bulk water supplier and river operator in New South Wales is currently working on its submission to the regulator in respect of the 2025 rural water pricing determination. To progress this matter, WaterNSW have engaged a not-for-profit group called the newDemocracy Foundation who have advised that they are “taking an innovative, bottom-up approach, focusing on hearing from everyday people and gathering their views on various issues relating to water management.

There was a good article on their approach on the ABC News website last week. To read the article go to <https://www.abc.net.au/news/> and search, bottom up.

newDemocracy is keen to spread the message of its processes that aim to provide an opportunity for those in the community who have a special relationship to water supply and local rivers to meaningfully contribute their views. To this end they have produced a booklet which can be sourced at: <https://www.newdemocracy.com.au/water/> It's an interesting consultation process that hopefully gives stakeholders, at all levels, the opportunity to contribute and be heard.

Quote of the week: “If people want to travel outside the Greater Sydney area, they will be stopped by Police. If they are not stopped by Police, local communities will only encourage that.” Deputy Police Commissioner Gary Warboys talking about the need for compliance by Sydneysiders with the Public Health Orders.