

COVID

COVID keeps rolling on, not just in Bourke Shire, but across the State and the Central West, in general. Given the number of positive cases in the Bourke Shire, a virtual Emergency Operations Centre has been established and is operating to allow the various supporting agencies a clear and consistent intelligence picture to support their own planning. This Centre is headed up in Bourke by Inspector Jeff Little, Officer-In-Charge at Bourke Police. The challenges that Police, Health and basically all contributing parties face are significant. The focus ultimately is to ensure that as a community we are safe and we all get through this pandemic. You know the drill: Stay-At-Home, Get Tested, Get a Vaccination.

Food Operations.

I have written in a previous edition of this Column regarding the distribution of foodhampers to those members of the community affected by positive cases of COVID in the Bourke Shire. A significant amount of assistance has been forthcoming from various organisations with Maranguka taking the lead, as the Community Hub, and being the conduit between the Agencies and the recipients. Their work is considerable and much appreciated. Maranguka is being supported by a core local team including: Aboriginal Affairs NSW, Outback Division of General Practice, Bourke Health Service, NSW Rural Fire Service, Council and substantially supported by the NSW Government through Resilience NSW.

As I mentioned last week, specific criteria has been developed for the distribution of Food Hampers and Care Packs provided by Resilience NSW. These criteria apply for any COVID affected household in Bourke LGA, and for all affected communities across NSW. It is considered important to again relay this criteria for the potential receipt of a Resilience Food Hamper and Care Pack:

If you have been instructed to isolate because you and/or your family household are either:

- *COVID positive;*
- *waiting on test results and must isolate at home; or*
- *a close contact and must isolate at home;*

And

- *can't access the supermarket because there are no family/ friends permitted to source groceries safely and provide contactless delivery;*
- *don't currently have the financial means; or*
- *don't have the ability to order online.*

In addition to the Resilience NSW packages, the local team is co-ordinating food packages and relief from a growing number of philanthropic and charitable organisations who are providing support. It is important the relief is centralised, in this case using Maranguka as the hub, to make sure there is not duplications or gaps in relief. The team is guided by the principle of trying to get the right amount of support to the right households at the right times.

Up until last Saturday evening, our Rural Fire Service Volunteers had delivered 261 Resilience food hampers and 51 care packages to the community. Super. The provision of these packages is a great service to the community,

however, they can't go on forever. Once a positive case has been cleared of the virus, provision of packages will potentially cease. If you require assistance, please ring Maranguka on 0428 892 210 to discuss your circumstances.

Councils Financial Statements

Council is required under the Local Government Act to prepare, have audited and lodge with the Office of Local Government, its Annual Financial Statements within five (5) months of the end of the financial year, ie by 30 November. To its significant credit, Councils Finance Team have been working very hard in past weeks to complete this years Statements, such that they have now been lodged with the Audit Office for finalisation prior to lodgement with the Department. With the Office of Local Government advising Councils that it will consider requests for extensions of lodgement on a case by case basis, Bourke Shire will not need to seek any such extension. As I alluded to above, the Statements require audit by the NSW Audit Office. Whilst the Audit Office oversees Councils audit, they engage private audit practices to undertake the audit. The Audit Team were to be on ground in Bourke on Monday 16 August 2021, however the COVID Public Health Order requirements put paid to that. For the second year in succession, the Auditors could not attend Bourke in person. Notwithstanding, the Audit has proceeded, albeit remotely. The Auditors have access to Councils finance system and can access the required documentation remotely. Whilst that all sounds easy, auditors by their nature ask a lot of questions and finance staff were kept busy researching and providing responses, as requested. The audit is near completed and I thank the Finance Team, and their Manager, Leonie Brown, for their significant work under difficult conditions having regard to the current COVID environment.

Aboriginal Health Scholarship.

The Aboriginal Environmental Health Unit of NSW Health has announced that applications for the 2022 Aboriginal Environment Health Scholarship are now open and closing on 11 October 2021. Environmental Health encompasses the health impacts of the interaction between humans and the environment. Environmental health professionals work with communities to ensure the provision of basic sanitation, waste management, sound buildings and safe food and water. Additionally they may become involved in understanding and controlling pollution in both the environment and occupational settings, the assessment and management of complex environmental and occupational risk factors and assessment of the built environment. On a wider global level, environmental health professionals may become involved in actively examining the health impact of acid rain, climate change, movement of hazardous waste, ozone depletion, overpopulation and resource depletion. Sounds interesting

This is the first time that this scholarship has been offered.

It supports Aboriginal people to complete an undergraduate degree in environmental health with the flexibility to study full-time or part-time. Successful recipients receive funding such that their subject fees are paid along with \$500 a year for student administration fess and other costs.

This is a fantastic opportunity for an Aboriginal Student, and potentially a student from Bourke, to study environmental health at University, and not be saddled with a Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) debt when finishing their studies. For further information please contact the Aboriginal Environmental Health Unit on (02) 9391 9790 or reply via email at NSWH-AEHU@health.nsw.gov.au and one of their staff will be in contact with you.

Environmental Water Plan

I received an email last week advising that the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder had released its Environmental Water Plan for 2021-2022. The Plan is about identifying where Commonwealth water for the environment might best be delivered in the year ahead.

The Federal Government through its Commonwealth Environmental Water Office (CEWO) has produced a raft of documentation and if you have an interest in this matter, documentation can be found on their website: www.environment.gov.au Whilst the CEWO notes that water storages across the northern basin, which includes

Bourke, have increased substantially during 2021, resulting in much improved water allocations, due to the severity of the record-breaking drought, recovery of river and wetland ecosystems will take time and that they are looking forward to working with their partners in the coming year to deliver water to where it's needed most.

Winter Sports

Due to COVID, many winter sports have come to an end sooner than expected with no finals or grand finals being played. Such was the case locally with the Darling Barwon Rugby League Competition Grand Final having being set down for Bourke a couple of weeks ago having to be cancelled. In addition, various other local and regional winter sport competitions have been cancelled. Many minor premiers have been awarded premiership status. The exception is of course the NRL and AFL competitions, which continue. The quality of these games is most high and the efforts of Administrators in keeping the games going is to be commended. Being able to watch a bit of footy has been a light relief to many people across the state during the period of Stay at Home.

Another casualty from the current COVID restrictions is the Tour de Oroc cycling event that was to be having an overnight stay and fundraising event in Bourke during October 2021. Last week, the organisers of the event decided to postpone the Tour until March 2022, which I must say I consider to be a wise decision given the unpredictability that NSW currently faces. The Tour raises funds for the Macquarie Homestay facility in Dubbo, and in advice just received, the Tour will now arrive in Bourke on Wednesday 23 March 2022. Macquarie homestay is an excellent facility that provides accommodation for people attending Dubbo Hospital. Many Bourke residents have utilised this important regional facility.

Quote of the Week: "Be strong now, because things will get better. It might be stormy now, but it can't rain forever." – Unkown.