



“From the General Manager’s Desk” 9 September 2021”

Diggers on the Darling.

I heard a radio show last Wednesday seeking comments from listeners as to where they were when they heard about the tragic passing of Diana, Princess of Wales, twenty-four (24) years ago on 31 August 1997. In years to come, residents of Bourke will undoubtedly ask, where were you when you heard about “Diggers on the Darling” being burnt to the ground on the 1st day of Spring in 2021?

The loss of Diggers to the Bourke community cannot be underestimated. Firstly, and most importantly, Diggers was a memorial to Bourke’s war veterans. The loss of memorabilia relating to local returned veterans is most unfortunate. I was reminded this week of the episode on the ABC TV Show Landline which told the story of Bourke Shire Councillor, Victor Bartley, and his experiences as a Vietnam War Veteran. I watched the episode again over the weekend and was saddened of vision of Victor at Diggers in front of a wall of memorabilia which unfortunately is now gone. History and visual memories.....gone.

Diggers was also obviously an entertainment and social hub for the Bourke community, an eatery and gathering point for Government and Agency officials working in Bourke, a destination for tourists, or just a place to get a cup of coffee. Digger’s was known far and wide. The calls that Council received from very high levels of the NSW Government were most appreciated and reflected the importance of the facility to the community.

Diggers was also a source of employment. It is hoped that the community sees Phillip, Anne- Marie and their team back in business in Bourke, sooner rather than later. It doesn’t seem that long ago that the Governor of NSW, Her Excellency, the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC QC hosting a vice regal reception in the Hall adjacent to Diggers with Sangita and her team of Rookson, Yasoda and Jay successfully catering for the evening.

The focus on Diggers for the time being is the clean-up of the site. As per normal procedures in matters such as this, Council staff have met with the owner and issued a Clean-up Notice, which is served under Section 91 of the Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997. It is a formal regulatory process. The notice requires the owner, amongst other matters, to ultimately provide Council with a clearance certificate that demonstrates that the site is free of waste and contaminates. Council is working with the owner of the site to assist in the timely clean up.

At this point, the line from the 1970’s song by Joni Mitchell, titled, "Big Yellow Taxi" seems most appropriate in respect of the loss of Diggers: “Don't it always seem to go, that you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone.”

Bourke Airport

This upcoming weekend two (2) RAAF Hercules C-130J Aircraft will be utilising the Bourke Aerodrome to undertake a series of exercises involving instrument approaches with low overshoots, full stops and touch and go's. These aircraft would be one of the largest aircraft to ever operate at the Bourke Aerodrome. The C130-J can carry close to 20 tonnes of payload. It has a length of 30 metres, a wingspan of 40metres and has four (4) Rolls Royce engines which generate a total of 18,500 shaft horsepower. Interestingly the Hercules has a maximum speed 670 km/h, cruises at 644km/h and has a range of 3,300 km, about the distance from Bourke to Darwin! A large aircraft indeed.

Water Telemetry

Bourke's new water treatment plant is generally operating well. Staff and contractors have successfully moved operations from the old plant to the new plant. The new plant contains a significant amount of technology including an electronic telemetry system. Telemetry is an automated communications process that allows the measurement and collection of data. The plants telemetry software systems receive signals from multiple installations of telemetry sensors throughout the plants water treatment process. The sensors that are part of the system provides data on a variety of indicators including, as an example, water levels in the reservoir and once full, takes action to turn the treatment process off. For some reason on Tuesday evening the telemetry system malfunctioned such that the plant stopped producing water for a period of hours. A quick reboot the next morning saw the processing of water recommence however the malfunction resulted in water levels in the reservoirs fall, with this impacting on water pressures in the town on Thursday. You might have noticed your shower was a bit light on Wednesday morning. Telemetry malfunctions are generally rare; however, they are all part of the commissioning of a sophisticated water treatment facility.

Rates

Council rates can be paid either annually, with the total amount having been due on 31 August, or by quarterly instalments with the instalment dates each year being 31 August, 30 November, 28 February and 31 May.

Given that the Council office in Mitchell St, Bourke is closed due to COVID requirements, Council will not charge interest on overdue instalments which were due on 31 August 2021 until after 14 September 2021. This will allow rate payers an extended period to pay their rates without the stress of incurring additional fees.

There are numerous payment options available in respect of paying your rates. These are via BPay; credit/debit card payments; payments through the mail by sending a cheque or providing credit card details. You can also make arrangements with Council to pay your rates and water accounts by weekly, fortnightly, monthly or quarterly instalments from your nominated bank account.

For all enquiries please regarding rates you can email bourkeshire@bourke.nsw.gov.au or phone the Council office on 6830 8000.

Council Crews

With the Council office being closed, various staff have been working from home and most of our outdoor staff have been stood down as Council has taken a very cautious approach to COVID. Put simply we don't want COVID amongst our workforce. Last week we bought our Works Services Branch staff to full time work on the basis of each of the staff working in their own individual bubble. The bubble consists of themselves and they work and eat by themselves and not interact with each other or with

members of the public whilst they are at work. This week we have started bringing our road construction and maintenance crews back to work on the same bubble basis. What I am really pleased about is that by next week, a large majority of the Council work force will have received their second COVID vaccination. I have received my second vaccination and I have to say that there is a level of confidence that comes with receiving that second shot.

Air Services

As a member of the Far West Joint Organisation of Councils, along with Cobar and Walgett Council, Bourke Shire continues to oversee the air services contract that see flights to each of the member Council areas. Since the flights commenced back in October 2019, just as numbers are on the increase, COVID restrictions simply decimate numbers. As I have heard from various sources, the last two (2) years would have to be the worst time to commence an air transport service. Rather than put the air services to Bourke into hibernation, the JO has negotiated a model whereby flights to Bourke are still available – if there is at least one passenger. If there are no passengers, the Bourke air services provider, Air Link, will not fly the route that day. Whilst the JO pays a fee to have the aircraft, effectively on standby, this model is preferred to closing the service down and not having the option to fly as required.

The Dragons

In one of my earlier columns this year, I think it was after the St George Dragons had struggled against the South Sydney Rabbitohs in the Charity Shield, I made comment that I feared that it was going to be a long season for the Dragons. Long has it been! The 2021 season is one best put away in the cupboard and forgotten about as the Club seemed to lurch from one crisis to another. The season essentially culminated in the infamous BBQ get together and from there they didn't win another game. Now I read that Tariq Simms, who I thought had a good season, has apparently been advised that he can look for another club next season, despite being contracted with the Dragons until the end of the 2022 season. Rugby League as a professional sport can be ruthless. Anyway, there is always next year.

Quote: "Family is the most important thing in the world." - Diana.

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