



## “From the General Manager’s Desk” 17 February 2022”

### Crime Issues

The last four (4) months have been a considerably tough time for the Bourke community in terms of juvenile crime. The weekend of 5 and 6 February 2022 was an extremely poor weekend in terms of criminal activity in the town with two (2) cars stolen and burnt out and the visiting Magistrate assaulted in her motel room on the Sunday evening, as part of an aggravated break and enter. Whilst the Mayor has previously made representations to the NSW Attorney General on the issue of the bailing of youth offenders, and more recently held discussions on the crime issue with Bourke’s local State member, the Member for Barwon Roy Butler MP; senior officers from Regional NSW and with senior officers from the hard-working Bourke Police, the previous weekends unsavory activities demanded a higher level of representations and action. To this end, Mayor Barry emailed an extensive letter to the States Premier, the Hon Dominic Perrottet, last week. Through contacts established during the visit to Bourke of the NSW Cabinet in Nov 2019, Council received assurances from staff of the Premiers Office that the letter would “be personally read by the Premier”.

In such letter, the Mayor highlighted specific incidents that had occurred during the months of January and early February 2022 and in doing so, highlighted that many of the break-ins at residential properties had occurred at residences occupied by vulnerable members of the Bourke community. The Mayor also spoke about the impact of the situation on our visitors and the fact that the perpetrators of these crimes are mostly young people who face a very ordinary life and future. The Mayor sought the urgent assistance of the Premier requesting that the “governments brightest minds” assist Bourke to develop and implement effective programs. “Straight talk and clear action” are what the Mayor said was needed. The Mayor in closing invited the Premier to Bourke or alternatively the Mayor was happy to travel to Sydney to progress the issue.

A copy of the letter was also forwarded to Roy Butler MP and also the Hon Dugald Saunders, Member for Dubbo and the recently appointed Minister for Western NSW. The Mayor also had subsequent discussions with Minister Saunders regarding the seriousness of the situation and I am confident that the pleas of the Mayor for assistance, on behalf of the community, are being heard at the highest levels of Government.

### Health Issues

Services provided to the Bourke region by the Western NSW Local Health District (LHD) have been profoundly impacted by the lack of staff at the Bourke Multi-Purpose Service (MPS). The ability of the LHD to attract nursing staff is unfortunately at a very low point. This is obviously a major concern for

Council, and most in the community, with the current crime issues in Bourke having certainly made the attraction of staff to Bourke even more difficult in the current labor shortage environment being experienced across the nation. Last Monday week, the Mayor, Councils Manager Corporate Services, Leonie Brown and I met with Mark Spittal, the recently appointed Chief Executive Officer of the LHD. We had previously met with Mr Spittal and various members of his team prior to Christmas, via audio-visual link, to discuss our concerns regarding staffing numbers at the hospital over the Christmas/New Year period. Our meeting last week was “face-to-face” at Council after Mr Spittal drove to Bourke to meet with staff at the MPS. It was certainly good to meet in person. Council took the opportunity to discuss the need for important leadership positions at the MPS to be filled, sooner rather than later; nursing issues; recruitment issues; and safety at the facility both in terms of accommodation and at the MPS itself.

Post the meeting Mr Spittal provided advice in terms of some progress in respect of the deploying of senior nurses to Bourke from the wider NSW Health system and from other Local Health Districts in the State. This was good news.

As part of our discussions on the Monday, Mr Spittal sought the assistance of Council to engage with new medical staff to maximise a positive experience in Bourke. In this regard I have advised Mr Spittal that Councils Manager of Economic Development, Melanie Milgate, is excited at the prospect of engaging and assisting not only these potential new staff, but other staff as progress is made in manning the MPS. Melanie was previously employed at the Outback Division of General Practice in Bourke and engaged with Medical Placement Students in presenting and increasing their understanding of Bourke. Whether the induction of these new to town medical staff includes a tour of town, the Back O Bourke Centre, a run out to Mt Oxley, an organised dinner, interaction at a service club event, whatever – Council is more than happy to work with the LHD, or any local business, to make a move to Bourke of their staff a success.

### **Good News for Louth**

The Louth Tennis Courts Reserve is situated on land owned by the NSW Government. It is located on what is known as Crown Land. In partnership with the Louth Chamber of Commerce, an application was previously made for funding under the Crown Reserves Improvement Fund. Last week Council received advice that the application in the amount of \$91,058 has been successful. Council will auspice the expenditure of the funds that will result in the finalisation of the sports precinct at the Louth Courts which will include the laying of a synthetic bowling green and a cricket practice wicket. Council recently upgraded two of the Louth Tennis courts with synthetic grass, utilising funding provided by the NSW Governments, Stronger Communities Program.

On a recent visit to Louth by Council staff, it was great to witness the new courts with residents advising that the new facilities are being regularly utilised by locals with the community recognising that the tennis facilities are another way of bringing families together and a way of encouraging visitors to stop and have a hit of tennis along the Darling River Run! The additional sport facilities will only further enhance the participation in sporty locals and visitors. A big thank you to the NSW Government for the funding but also congratulations to the Louth Chamber for their vision and drive in achieving the funding to bring the precinct to fruition.

### **Western Regional Water Strategy - Aboriginal Consultation**

The NSW government is developing regional water strategies for 12 regions in NSW to enhance resilience of water sources for local communities, the environment and to protect Aboriginal cultural values and rights, while supporting economic prosperity over the next 20 years. Government has

identified the Bourke community as an important part of the conversation in developing a draft Western Regional Water Strategy.

One of the overarching objectives of regional water strategies is to recognise and protect Aboriginal rights, interests and access to water. Following the first round of workshops in 2021, the Water Division of the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (WDPIE) is holding a second series of workshops to provide an update on the Western strategy and seek feedback and local knowledge on some of the proposed Cultural options considered in the strategy.

Each workshop will be independently facilitated, commence with a yarning circle and include a light lunch. WDPIE's coordinated engagement approach will be held in collaboration with Water Infrastructure NSW and team members from the Barwon-Darling Water Sharing Plan in some locations. This will provide the opportunity to discuss a range of water projects at one time. The Bourke Workshop will be held on Tuesday 8 March 2022 at the Maranguka Community Hub, 41B Mitchell St, Bourke from 10am - 1pm. If you would like to join a session, dial in remotely or view the COVID-19 safety plan, or require any other assistance, please email [regionalwater.strategies@dpie.nsw.gov.au](mailto:regionalwater.strategies@dpie.nsw.gov.au). For more information on regional water strategies visit : [www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/plans-programs/regional-water-strategies](http://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/plans-programs/regional-water-strategies)

**Quote: ““If rural health services don't exist, people cannot access the health care they need,”** National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA) Chief Executive, Gabrielle O'Kane, with the NRHA estimating that 7 million people, or about 28 per cent of Australia's population, are forgoing \$4 billion of healthcare because of a lack of GPs, specialists and allied health workers such as psychologists and physiotherapists in rural and remote areas.