



**BOURKE  
SHIRE  
COUNCIL**

## “From the General Manager’s Desk” 26 May 2022

### **New General Manager**

Following a comprehensive recruitment process that involved two (2) rounds of advertising in various newspapers, industry publications and on recruitment websites, formal applications that required applicants to address 16 selection criteria, first round interviews with a panel of four and then a final interview with eight(8) of the ten (10) Councillors, Police checks and finally referee checks, Mayor Barry announced at this week's Council meeting that Councils long serving Manager of Corporate Services, Mrs Leonie Brown had been appointed to the position of Councils General Manager effective 4 July 2022. The current Council is to be congratulated on appointing the first female General Manager for Bourke Shire and further continue to progress a culture that results in the growth and development of the organisation’s staff such that they can “climb the ladder” to achieve what they desire. In Leonie’s case, she has “climbed the ladder” over some 20 years at Bourke Shire having held various positions in her formative years of local government before commencing in the role of Manager of Corporate Services some 16 years ago. When Mayor Barry invited me to lead the organisation commencing February 2021 for a 12-16 month period, before responding I spoke with Leonie to make certain that she wasn’t going anywhere. Her knowledge and passion for Bourke coupled with her work ethic and drive were all very evident to me early on and her continuity in the organisation was essential for me to ensure a smooth transition following Ross Earl’s retirement. Well done Leonie.

### **Bourke Show**

What was shaping up to be an undoubtedly fantastic 2022 Bourke Show came to nothing when the Show Committee was left with little choice but to cancel the Show on the Thursday prior to the planned event due to the high level of rain that Bourke had received during Show Week. It would certainly not have been an easy decision for the Committee given all the hard work that had gone into this year's Show, but certainly a decision I support. The amount of water laying on and around the Renshaw certainly would have made conditions very dangerous for all participants, both human and animal.

### **Blue Mountains Tunnel**

The NSW Government has confirmed in recent weeks that an 11-kilometre toll-free tunnel under the Blue Mountains east of Lithgow, from Blackheath to Little Hartley, is the preferred option following an in-depth feasibility analysis and extensive investigation process. Announcing the tunnel, Deputy Premier and Minister for Regional NSW, the Hon Paul Toole said the proposed tunnel would be Australia’s longest road tunnel with the project on target for construction works on the east and west stages of the upgrade to commence early next year. The design of the tunnel features dual carriageways for both eastbound and westbound motorists in separate twin tunnels and a gentler gradient to cut travel times and improve freight efficiencies.

Essentially the tunnel will allow traffic to bypass the steep climbs and descent of Mt Victoria and River Lett Hill and further avoids the ever-congested village of Blackheath. Whilst there will undoubtedly be economic development, productivity and safety benefits that stem from the tunnels, it is the improved accessibility that will assist in unlocking the potential of western NSW for the benefit of all residents and visitors to our part of the state. Whilst it seems a long way from the Blue Mountains, the improvements proposed by the tunnel will significantly assist our part of the state by allowing tourists to traverse the mountains and then hopefully, in the not too distant future, drive all the way to Bourke, Wanaaring and then Tibooburra on sealed and well maintained roads.

## **Roads**

In terms of the roads in the Bourke Shire, the recent rains resulted in Council having to close its unsealed road network for an extended period. Whilst such closures are acknowledged as being inconvenient, all travellers are requested to respect "Road Closed" signs when such signage is in place. Driving on wet unsealed roads is not only dangerous but invariably results in significantly damaged and rutted roads that Council simply doesn't have the resources to repair.

In respect of Councils road works program, crews are currently undertaking widening works on the Mitchell Highway, at locations both north and south of Bourke. In total this work will result in a further 12.86km of this Highway widened. Out on the Kamilaroi Highway, east of Bourke, Council is undertaking 4.1km of widening. These road widening works are being undertaken by Council on State Highways on behalf of Transport for NSW. Road projects take a significant amount of pre-planning and it is certainly not a case of turning up on the day and starting work. Having regard to this planning, in coming weeks/months various projects will commence. This week, subject to favourable weather conditions work on the widening and sealing of an 8 km section of the currently unsealed Bourke to Louth road (MR68) will commence. A further 4km of this road is planned for sealing early next year. In early July widening and sealing of a 2.36 km section of Weelong Road will be undertaken. Toorale Lane will see widening and sealing works on 5 km of the road starting in late July 2022 and then from August 2022, further work on Toorale Lane, down to Trilby Station, will see this road widened and sealed for a further length of 12 km.

In addition to Councils Road Construction projects, Council also undertakes road maintenance works. In this regard, Council has received flood recovery funding to repair roads that were damaged in the November flood event. Approximately one quarter of the defected roads has been repaired, with the remaining work able to be programmed such that council can fix these the defects over a 2-year period. One road that Council is keen to see repaired is the River Road causeway that incurred significant damage during the high water earlier this year. Council is awaiting permits from NSW Fisheries before commencing the necessary repairs.

## **PV Jandra**

The Paddle Vessel (PV) Jandra was forced to cease its operation on the Darling River on 21 April 2022 due to the high-water level and the strength of flows in the Darling River. After a very busy Easter Weekend, which saw excellent patronage, staff were disappointed to have to make the required decision to cease operation for the foreseeable future. It doesn't seem all that long ago from when the PV Jandra was, unfortunately, the regular photographic shot to reflect the drought with pictures of the vessel sitting on the floor of an empty Darling River. Approaching three (3) years later and the operation of the Jandra is again impacted, only this time due to too much water.

As I write this Column, the Darling River at Bourke is at a height of 8.72 m and is currently dropping 6 cm a day. With no further flows, some 20 days would be required for the river to get under 7m, the level

required for the Jandra to operate. The issue of course are the expected inflows into the Darling River in coming weeks following the substantial rains across large parts of Queensland early May. Already the River is rising at Walgett, Mungindi and Boggabilla and the Culgoa River is rising at Brenda. All in all, it is expected that it will be some time before the PV Jandra once again takes tourists for a cruise along the River.

### **Ministerial Visitation**

Back in November 2019, at the height of the drought, the then Premier of NSW, the Hon Gladys Berejiklian, led her Government Ministers to Bourke for a Community Cabinet meeting. Some two and a half years later, with much improved climatic conditions, yesterday saw Deputy Premier, the Hon Paul Toole leading various Government Ministers to Bourke. Accompanying the Deputy Premier were the Hon. Ben Franklin, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Minister for the Arts and Minister for Regional Youth; the Hon. Brad Hazzard, NSW Minister for Health and the “Champion of Bourke”; the Hon. Sarah Mitchell, Minister for Education & Early Learning and the Hon. Bronnie Taylor, Minister for Women, Minister for Regional Health and Minister for Mental Health. It was former Premier Mike Baird, who appointed Minister Hazzard as the “Champion of Bourke”, and it is pleasing to see that he still holds this mantle as he continues to seek a coordinated approach to service delivery for Bourke. It was great to see so many Ministers in town and Mayor Barry certainly warmly welcomed all Ministers to Bourke.

**Quote: “I feel the need.....the need for speed!”** An iconic line from the initial Top Gun Movie with the sequel, Top Gun:Maverick, premiering today, after a 36 year gap.