



**BOURKE
SHIRE
COUNCIL**

“From the
General Manager’s Desk”
30 June 2022”

Regional Economic Development Strategies (REDS) Update

The Department of Regional NSW is currently in the process of updating its Regional Economic Development Strategies (REDS). These documents provide a tailored economic development strategy for each of the 38 Functional Economic Regions across Regional NSW. Bourke Shire is in the Western Plains Region of the State which comprises the Local Government Areas of Bogan, Brewarrina, Cobar, Coonamble, Walgett and Warren Councils.

As part of this project, the Department of Regional NSW has engaged Price Waterhouse Coopers (PwC) to help understand future regional development priorities and the economic impacts to regions of recent events including drought, bushfires, floods and COVID-19.

Last Monday, in the company of Councils management staff, I attended a REDS Update Workshop and contributed in respect of Bourke. Strategies are most important in terms of pursuing a direction and avoiding ad hoc decision making. In this regard, I noted a comment in the existing 2018-2022 Western Plains Strategy which states that, “A need has been identified to provide a Regional air service between the Region’s major towns and Dubbo as travel distances can be prohibitive for skilled workers and service providers considering opportunities in the Region.” It is through these strategic documents where a broad need is identified that leads to an outcome, and in the case of Bourke, Cobar and Walgett/Lightning Ridge, that outcome is the provision of funding by Government that subsidises flights by Airlink Airlines and Fly Pelican to these areas.

An important component of last week's State Budget, will see the NSW Government implement a major regional health workforce incentive scheme with \$883 million to be spent over the next four years to attract and retain health staff in rural and regional NSW. The package will target critical and hard to fill roles to ensure the operation of regional health facilities, and will include nurses and midwives, paramedics, pathologists and scientific staff, pharmacists and allied health professionals, as well as support and ancillary staff.

It is understood that as part of the package, hard-to-fill, critical roles in rural and remote locations will be incentivised by offering health workers recruitment and retention incentive packages worth up to \$10,000 per year plus assistance with accommodation and relocation and some other non-financial incentives. Incentives can include a range of benefits, such as salary boost, sign on bonuses, retention payments, additional leave, assistance with childcare expenses, assistance with transport and housing support, and access to training and education.

In all the \$883 million investment will include funding for:

- Tailored incentive programs for healthcare staff to take up and retain positions in regional, rural and remote NSW – which can include a tailored incentive package of up to \$10,000 plus additional leave, relocation reimbursement, professional development and study assistance;
- Increased training positions for nursing graduates, nurse practitioners and medical interns;
- Expanding rural generalist and procedural training positions;
- Career development and secondment opportunities for healthcare workers based in regional, rural and remote NSW, including for those based in metropolitan areas to 'try out' working in regional NSW;
- Increased numbers of Aboriginal nurse cadetships, and
- HECS incentive package for allied health professionals.

It is very difficult to attract and retain staff to any profession at the moment let alone to rural and remote areas such as Bourke. Health services are obviously critical, and it is hoped that the Governments initiatives brings health workers and stability to our local health services.

IPTAAS Changes

In addition to the Workforce Funding for Health, last week's State Budget included significant changes to the rebates payable to those people who need to travel for medical treatment with an extra \$149m in funding provided for the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Scheme (IPTAAS). The changes will result in patients receiving 40 cents per kilometre for driving their car more than 100km for treatment. The previous rate was 22 cents a kilometre. This means that if you had to travel the 850 km's from Bourke to Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in Sydney to see a specialist, and return, the Scheme would now pay a travel amount of \$680 compared to the previous \$374. In addition, accommodation rates have been increased from the existing \$43-\$60 per night to a flat rate of \$75 per night. Further information in respect of accessing the Scheme is available at: www.iptaas.health.nsw.gov.au

Funding Provisions

Council has received the go ahead from Infrastructure NSW to undertake the reconstruction and sealing of a further 9 km of roadway on the Wanaaring Road with the provision of \$2.6m in funding. This is a most pleasing outcome for the Bourke community as Council endeavours to seek further funding to complete the sealing of the remaining 27 kilometres of this important link road. I also noticed from last week's NSW State Budget that an amount \$13.30m has been allocated for major upgrades to the Bourke Police Station. Such upgrades are well overdue, and it is hoped that the upgrades can progress quickly given that a Development Application (DA) for the upgrade of the facility was essentially previously ready for submission. This follows a successful DA pre lodgement meeting attended by Council officers, Heritage Advisors and architects many months ago. Our Police work very hard and they deserve improved office working conditions to what are currently available.

Inquiry into Speed Limits

The Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety (Staysafe) is conducting an inquiry into speed limits and road safety in regional NSW with reference to:

- a) The impact of speed limits and travel times on driver behaviour and safety
- b) The impact of improved vehicle technology and road infrastructure
- c) The use of variable speed limits
- d) Any other related matters.

The Committee would like to hear from people who regularly travel long distances on rural and regional roads and their experiences of road safety, especially regarding existing speed limits and variable speed zones. Most people in the Bourke Shire have to travel long distances so this is a perfect opportunity to utilise your experiences and have your say about the current situation and how it can be improved. It may be that you feel the current speed limits on the open road are too low or that the licencing points system is inadequate given the number of kilometres travelled in this area of the state compared to the suburbs of metropolitan areas. Submissions close on 5 July 2022.

More information and updates over the course of the inquiry are available on the Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety website at the following address:

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/Pages/inquiry-details.aspx?pk=2878#tab-termsofreference>

Social Media

I was reading recently of a South Australian Council that decided to rescind an offer it had made in respect of engaging a highly qualified person to the role of Chief Executive Officer. The Council made the decision not to proceed after it came to light that the once successful applicant had strongly expressed his opinion in respect of a particular matter on social media which led to “community outrage. The Council issued a statement, stating that “In light of the feedback and with the best interests of the community and council’s employees in mind” it had been mutually agreed not to proceed with the intended appointment. It’s a great example of the downside of social media and an abject example of why we all need to be careful when we start expressing our opinions on social media. Once the written words or photos are uploaded, they are available for all to see. It’s fine to have an opinion but we need to pick where and how it is expressed.

Thank you

This is my final Column as General Manager with Bourke Council. Leonie Brown commences in the role effective next Monday, 4 July 2022. I take the opportunity to wish Leonie all the very best in her new position. I have enjoyed my 16-month term as General Manager in Bourke, working closely with Mayor Barry and Councils management team of Leonie, Peter, Melanie, Alex, Dwayne and Margo. They are all good people who work hard for Bourke. I thank the Councillors and all the Council staff for what they do for the community. Bourke is on the crest of a wave with current positive agricultural conditions, property prices, tourism traffic and the impending opening of the Abattoir, and the jobs that will come with such opening. I trust that the Bourke community “grabs” the opportunities that await.

Quote: “I think by the end of the year inflation will get close to 7 per cent, and we need to chart a course to bring it back down.” Reserve Bank Governor, Phillip Lowe.