



**BOURKE  
SHIRE  
COUNCIL**

## “From the General Manager’s Desk” 24 November 2022”

### **Flooding**

The scene of a 40-foot steel container flowing down the Mitchell Highway at Molong, as recently televised to the nation, very clearly exemplifies the power of flood water with Molong, Eugowra and Canowindra absolutely smashed by flash flooding in the early hours some two Monday mornings past. The damage to businesses located in the main street of Molong looked like pictures from a war zone. Residents of these towns and those in Cowra, Forbes and beyond are in shock with more flooding occurring whilst residents were still cleaning up from flooding earlier in the month. At Eugowra, a small village with some 700 people, it has been reported that 150 residents were rescued with 100 of these rescues being by helicopter from their rooftops. All hard to watch.

Here in Bourke, the Bureau of Meteorology was expecting a 14 metre major flood peak earlier this week. Whilst there is not expected to be a general impact to the Bourke township at this height, the Bureau is estimating that the river height may remain above the major flood level (12.7 m) until around mid-December. The Darling River at Louth is expected to reach 13.6 metres during late November 2022 with major flooding. People who have been around the western area for a while will regularly tell you “that every flood is different.” That is certainly proving to be the case in respect of water this flood, the water did not cross the Sydney Road on the Mitchell Highway, south of Bourke until Friday, 18 November 2022 where the river height was 13.76 meters. During previous floods, water has crossed the Sydney Road when the river hits 13.15m in Bourke. As I write this, the river is at 13.88 metres, both the Mitchell Highway and Kidman Way are now impacted with flood water Council in communication with Transport for New South Wales are taking action as necessary to keep the highways open as the water rises. Please monitor Councils website or Facebook page for up to date roads information.

Emergency services are certainly in full swing doing a fantastic job resupplying isolated communities and properties as a result of flooding. Last week there were 9 helicopters operating from the Bourke Airport undertaking their required tasks. One helicopter of particular interest was a very large Black Hawk helicopter which has been utilised to resupply fuel to Lightning Ridge. Isolated residents on properties requiring the resupply of essentials are encouraged to call NSW SES on **132 500**. The operator will issue you with a reference number and advise you on how to go about ordering and receiving your required needs. The Department of Primary Industries (DPI) and Local Land Service (LLS) are providing help to landholders who require emergency assistance with animal welfare. Please call the Agriculture and Animal Service Hotline on **1800 814 647** if you require these services.

Whilst we still have a while to go before the river drops, I take the opportunity to thank my staff, and the staff of the various government departments and the emergency services and volunteers for their considerable efforts in providing assistance to our communities. The efforts of so many people are very much acknowledged.

## **Water Buyback**

It is rather ironic that as nearly 150,000 megalitres (150 gigalitres) of water flows past Bourke each day, there are media reports that state water ministers have agreed to almost 50,000 megalitres (50 gigalitres) of water buybacks at last month's Ministerial Council meeting, with most of that water coming from NSW. According to *The Land*, relevant Federal Government staff revealed that the decision was to secure 46GL of surface water and 3GL of groundwater "through strategic purchases" to meet water recovery targets under the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. Whilst it is understood that 1.6GL of the buyback will be sourced from the Barwon-Darling river system, the proposal would undoubtedly send shivers through many people associated with Bourke and reignite memories of the negative impact that previous buybacks have had on our community. If the reports are correct, it will undoubtedly be a matter of, here we go again.

## **Late Bloomers**

One of the great benefits of all the rain, as a result of the La Nina weather event, is the growth and freshness of trees and flowers not just in our area, but right across the western region and State. I was interested to recently read that the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney had reported that Jacaranda Trees in Sydney, including some up to 175 years of age, blooming some two to three weeks later than usual. With Jacarandas easy to see due to their magnificent purple flowers, Botanic Garden staff have reported that the trees "have been confused by record rains, lower temperatures and cloud cover." Whilst blooming late, the number of buds on the trees are massive and that is the experience out our way with most trees looking lush.

## **Bogged**

I am hearing, and seeing, plenty of reports of vehicles and machinery getting bogged during these extended wet weather conditions. Subsequent retrieval of plant and equipment from a bog is so often an arduous, and an often-dangerous task. SafeWork NSW has reported of a 33-year-old farmer sustaining fatal head injuries during the extraction of a bogged bulldozer when one of the two D-shackles connecting the recovery strap failed, propelling the shackle through the glass door of the bulldozer. Tragic for all concerned.

If you do get stuck, it is important to take the time to fully assess the situation. Check the condition of the recovery equipment each and every time you use it. Look out for metal fatigue which may affect anchor points. Chains can stretch and cables and straps can fray. As a priority, keep bystanders at least two-and-a-half times the length of the recovery straps, cables, or chains away from – and to the side – of the recovery. Never stand next to it. When using cables, consider the use of pulleys for mechanical advantage, and when joining straps, avoid the use of steel shackles – they become projectiles if something breaks.

NSW Farmers have provided the following guidelines to reduce the risk to workers and others involved in vehicle and farm equipment recovery by:

- Performing a risk assessment before attempting any vehicle or equipment recovery.
- Assessing the work environment and conditions prior to commencing work. Avoid using vehicles and farm equipment if there is a likelihood of becoming bogged and if necessary postpone the work until conditions improve.
- Creating an exclusion zone around the stuck vehicle or piece of equipment during the recovery activity with only the vehicle operator and those necessary in the recovery being allowed inside the exclusion zone. Always ensure an effective communication method is established between those in the zone using voice, radio, or hand signals, as required.

- Ensuring anyone within the exclusion zone is standing at 90 degrees to the axis of the tow line. Do not stand at either end of the tow line as you are at higher risk of injury if the tow line breaks.
- Only using straps and attachments that are correctly rated for the weight and type of work involved.
- Using a recovery damper to reduce the force of the recoil and risk of injury if the recovery line does break.
- Only using anchor points on vehicles and machinery approved by the manufacturer.
- Aborting the extraction of the bogged vehicle or equipment if things are not going to plan.
- Choosing plant with laminated glass and external structural protection where available. Consult the original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) for tougher glass options and operator cabin protection in mobile plant
- Only using well maintained and approved equipment in line with the manufacturer's instructions.
- Ensuring you have an emergency procedure in place.

At some point, the very large majority of us have been bogged in some form of vehicle or a piece of machinery. The above advice is about taking the recovery process in a sensible, structured manner with a view to alleviating injury or worse.

### **Council Meeting**

Councils November 2022 Ordinary Meeting will be held on Monday 28 November 2022 commencing at 9.15am in the Council Chamber, 29 Mitchell St, Bourke. Members of the public are welcome to attend. The final meeting for 2022 will be held on Monday 19 December 2022 with no meeting scheduled for January 2023.

**Quote: "Even when the water recedes we urge motorists to be aware that while our crews are working around the clock to repair potholes and damaged roads, they simply cannot keep up with the volume of work at present."** NSW Regional Roads Minister, Sam Faraway, talking about the state of roads from the Blue Mountains to the Far West following all the recent flooding.