



**BOURKE  
SHIRE  
COUNCIL**

“From the  
General Manager’s Desk”  
15 December 2022”

### **Australia Day Activities**

Each year, Australia Day Ambassadors, from Olympians and Paralympians, environmentalists and foodies, to humanitarians and local heroes - more than 100 remarkable Australians participate in Australia Day activities around the state, sharing meaningful stories and connecting with communities. These high achieving individuals head to all corners of NSW on 26 January, volunteering their time and energy to contribute to local festivities.

The activities of the Ambassadors on Australia Day are as diverse as the communities and events themselves. Ambassadors generously volunteer their time and energy to inspire pride and celebration. They may hand out Australia Day community awards, help cook sausage sizzles and mingle with locals over a cup of tea. Ambassadors also give an address that captures the spirit of being Australian and present certificates at awards ceremonies.

I am happy to advise that the 2023 Australia Day Ambassador for Bourke Shire is Ms Robina Beard OAM. With respect to Ms Beard, many people possibly wouldn't recognise the name of this talented entertainer, dancer and actress who was awarded an OAM for her service to the arts in 2011 and in the same year received an Australian Dance Award for Lifetime Achievement. I suspect, however, that many of the more mature residents in the Bourke Community would remember Ms Beard as Madge from the long running advertisement for Palmolive dish washing liquid. “You know your soaking in it!” Ms Beard has been a former NSW Seniors Festival Ambassador, still runs exercise and tap-dancing classes for seniors and has a long portfolio of acting performances in well-known Australian television productions. I look forward to welcoming Ms Beard to Bourke for the Australia Day Celebrations to be held at the Bourke Memorial Swimming Pool on 26 January 2023.

### **Mitchell Highway**

After a period of 13 days of being closed, I was very happy last Tuesday (6/12) to receive advice from Transport for NSW advising Council to proceed to open the Mitchell Highway to all traffic, albeit from 8.00am to 7.00pm at that point. There's an old saying that “you don't know what you've got till it's gone” and that was certainly the case over the past near fortnight when our usual road access routes to/from Bourke became unavailable due to the floodwaters. I wish to place on record my appreciation to Council staff involved as a result of the road closures. From those that assessed the permit applications through to the staff on the front line. I particularly wish to thank this week, Councils Customer Services Staff who man the phones here at the Council offices and who took hundreds of calls in respect of “can I get through” enquiries over the closure period. Whilst not all people are always that pleasant when they don't necessarily get the answers they want or hoped for, I maintain my full support for the excellent job that the Customer Services Staff have done during a most difficult of time.

## **Snakes**

At the outset, I must confess that I am not a great fan of snakes. With that in mind I shivered when I read that NSW Farmers are reporting increased snake sightings by their members as floodwaters force the reptiles onto higher ground. Reports from farmers stating that they saw "three black snakes near their place in a really short space of time, and it's been like this for a while, they're just trying to escape the water like we all are," are not uncommon.

With livestock being lost to snakes because some farms are more like islands than paddocks, and they can't get to a vet, it's certainly time to be most aware of the reptiles. The spike in snake numbers coincides with increased activity during the warmer late spring and summer months. According to the Australian Reptile Park, Australia sees approximately 3000 snake bites each year with about 10 per cent of these requiring antivenom. First aid for snake bites included keeping the bite victim calm and immobile, removing all jewellery or watches, applying a pressure-immobilisation bandage to the bite site, then bandaging the entire limb (not just the bite area) and seeking emergency medical assistance immediately by calling an ambulance or going directly to hospital. Around the house, lawns are best kept short and avoiding the piling up of household items was an excellent snake deterrent in our urban areas. Vigilance is the key.

## **The Red Fleet**

Back in my Column of 4 August 2022, I wrote that there had been considerable conjecture as to the accounting treatment of firefighting assets of the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS), known as the Red Fleet. In one corner are NSW councils, including Bourke Shire Council, and in the other, the NSW Audit Office. Somewhere in between are various Departments of the NSW Government. It is the view of the NSW Auditor General, Ms Margaret Crawford, and her Office, that Rural fire-fighting equipment, specifically the red fleet vehicles, is controlled by council's and should be recognised in their financial statements.

Bourke Shire Councils position, along with 67 other Councils throughout the State, is that the equipment is not Councils. At the time, there was advice from the NSW Audit Office of the potential for qualified audits being issued to Councils by the Audit Office if Councils failed to account for such equipment. Local Government NSW (LGNSW) has recently advised of "a dramatic increase in the number of councils being hit with qualified audits, after only two were issued in 2021" due to the insistence that council accounts include depreciation costs for Rural Fire Service (RFS) assets. The President of LGNSW, Councillor Darriea Turley of Broken Hill Council, has said that "A qualified audit report can have serious financial repercussions for councils, limiting their ability to obtain loans and grants." From Bourke Shires perspective, the Council was prepared to risk a qualified audit, such was the Councils concerns as to the approach by the Audit Office. For the Bourke Audit however, it was ultimately determined by the Audit Office that the apparent quantities of Red Fleet assets in the Bourke Shire was not material in respect of Councils Annual Financial Statements.

Throughout this ongoing dispute, Bourke Shire has made it clear to our local Rural Fire Service volunteers that Council re-affirms its complete support of and commitment to the local RFS brigades in the Bourke Shire such that volunteers are aware of Councils position in respect of this matter.

## **Soccer World Cup**

Whilst I didn't get up to watch Australia play Argentina in the Soccer World Cup Elimination Round, there was much evidence on television news reports that many in our capital cities did rise early and travel to public hubs to watch the game. The vision of smoke-filled locations in Sydney and Melbourne and vision of a capacity filled ground in Qatar, certainly shows the popularity of the World Game, at

least during the World Cup. I love how as Australians, even though we lost, we recognise the performance of the Socceroos and look forward to a new era of the game. As I say, I didn't watch the game in full. I saw some highlights where Australia went so close to scoring and potentially making the scores 2-2 at full time. So close but so far. On the issue of sport, I also saw the low attendance numbers for the First Cricket Test in Perth. Whilst much has been written that there is too much cricket these days, thus impacting attendance numbers, I think the bigger issue is cricket participation rates. Growing up on a place out of Fords Bridge, all the men and boys got involved in some form of cricket. Schools had teams of cricketers across the various year groups. Today that's certainly not the case with other sporting options available, or worse, kids don't play sport at all. If the kids aren't playing the game, its unlikely they want to go and watch a game. Times are changing and it falls to the administrators of the various sports, not just cricket, to keep their respective sport relevant in the marketplace. I don't envy their challenge.

**Quote: "Barack and I had always tried to operate on the principles of hope and hard work ... believing that most of us shared common goals, that progress could be made and measured, however incrementally, over time. Sure, maybe that's an earnest, hopeful story, but we invested in it."**

Michelle Obama reflecting on her closely synced relationship with husband and former US President, Barack Obama, in her new book.