



**BOURKE
SHIRE
COUNCIL**

“From the
General Manager’s Desk”
2 February 2023”

The New Year

As this is my first Column for 2023, I trust all had a restful and enjoyable Christmas and New Year. Looking ahead, 2023 will no doubt bring both opportunities and challenges for the Bourke community. On the topic of challenges, I again take this opportunity to thank all those who assisted the community during the flooding that occurred around Bourke during the latter months of last year. Whether it be the emergency services, NSW Police, or my staff at Council, to name but a few who assisted, your work was paramount in ensuring the safety of our community during a difficult time.

Flood Funding

With the water being so high for such a protracted time, Councils road infrastructure has certainly been impacted in terms of resulting damage, and for that matter, so have most roads across New South Wales. NSW Councils only have limited budgets for road maintenance and repair, and it has been pleasing to see the NSW Government provide, what I consider to be, substantial funding to undertake repairs to the road network across the State. Whilst some have said that the funding isn’t enough, I say it’s a great help and is very much appreciated.

In December last year, I wrote in one of my GM’s Columns that Bourke Shire was one of 94 Councils across the State to share in funding under the NSW Government’s \$50 million Fixing Local Roads Pothole Repair Round. The Government’s allocation to Bourke Shire was \$843,000 with these funds to be utilised repairing our weather damaged local and regional roads. Subsequent to this funding, the NSW Government in early January of this year announced a further \$500 million (half a \$billion) under the Regional and Local Roads Repair program. All 128 local councils in NSW are eligible for a one-off payment to help fix roads that were damaged by severe weather events during 2022 with the funds to be allocated based on the total kilometres of roads managed in each local government area, ie the Local and Regional road network within the LGA. Councils application was lodged as required by Friday 20 January 2023 and given the Shires extensive road network; it is anticipated that the funding will be significant with the Government expecting that it will announce the funding allocations this month. Once the funding deed is signed and returned, Council will receive a 100% upfront payment of the grant funding. This funding must then be expended by 29 February 2024.

Funding for repairs to the State Highways that traverse the Bourke Shire are separate to these funds with works, once confirmed by Transport for NSW, will either be undertaken by Council as part of its Roads Maintenance Council Contract (RMCC) that it has previously entered into with the NSW Government, or by emergency crews maintained by the Government.

In addition to this road funding Council will receive \$1 million in funding to assist with its recovery, as part of the jointly funded Commonwealth-State Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements. As a disaster declared Council, an upfront payment of \$1m will be received by Bourke Shire with Council then being

required to submit a Program of Works within three (3) months of receiving the funding with expenditure to be completed by June 2024. The 45 councils in NSW who were affected by storm and flooding events from August 2022 and onwards were formally notified that they are eligible for the \$1 million grants on 20 January 2023. One project currently being costed by staff in respect of the utilisation of a portion of these funds, is the replacement of the various flood gates in town. These gates are most important in keeping water out of Bourke as the river rises and age has certainly affected the performance of the existing gates, such that they are generally ready for renewal.

Australia Day Winners

Last Thursday the community came together at the Bourke War Memorial Olympic Pool Complex to reflect, respect and celebrate Australia Day. People in Bourke took the time to reflect on our history - its highs and its lows - to respect the stories of others and to celebrate our nation, its achievements and most of all, its people. Bourke's Australia Day Ambassador for this year was entertainer, dancer and actor, Ms Robina Beard OAM, who spoke passionately about what it truly means to her to be an Australian. Over the year's Bourke has been blessed with exceptional Australia Day Ambassadors and this year was no exception. It was a delight to be able to spend time with Robina and her son, Tim, during their time in Bourke.

Congratulations to the two (2) Bourke Residents who were naturalised by Mayor Barry to become Australian Citizens. Congratulations also to Bourke's Citizen of the Year, John Milgate; Young Citizen of the Year, Kobie Lollback; Sportsperson of the Year, Bourke Lady Bowlers; Young Sportsperson of the Year, Thomas Bowden; Emergency Services Volunteer of the Year, Karen Keuning and to Tony Mallon of Enngonia who received the award for Village Community Service. All these recipients were announced at the Australia Day event and are most worthy winners.

Pre School Relief

If you have preschool aged children you would be interested to know that the NSW Government is providing fee relief for families with preschool aged children in long day care and community and mobile preschools from January 2023. Families can save up to \$4,220 per child on community and mobile preschool fees and up to \$2,110 per child on long day care fees (in addition to the Child Care Subsidy). The fee relief will be passed on to families as a reduction in fees. For more information visit the Start Strong for Families website by going to: <https://education.nsw.gov.au> and searching start strong for families.

Resilience Gone

In December 2022, the NSW Government replaced Resilience NSW with the NSW Reconstruction Authority with the role of the Authority being to ensure NSW is best placed to face future natural disasters before they occur, recover quickly when they do and mitigate the impacts of future disasters that will face our communities. The now gone Resilience NSW was created in May 2020 by then Premier, Gladys Berejiklian, following the black summer bushfires that destroyed many parts of NSW in 2019 and 2020. Former Rural Fire Service Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons was appointed to lead the new Organisation and was given a wide brief to deal with disaster preparedness, response, recovery and rebuild. Unfortunately, Resilience encountered significant challenges in responding to the Lismore floods, and following a Government Inquiry, the decision was taken to take a different approach.

My only contact with Resilience NSW was during the COVID Pandemic during 2021 where they significantly assisted with food hampers for the Shire. My hope would be that the staff from Resilience are transferred to the new Authority and that it has a very clear brief as to its role and responsibilities.

Regardless of what the organisation is, my view is that unless the organisation and its staff have a clear set of accountabilities and know what they are responsible for, grey areas, overlap and oversight of accountability will continue to manifest such that failure is inevitable. Nothing quite like the left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing or both the left and right hands doing the same task in isolation.

As the new organisation on the block, the NSW Reconstruction Authority needs to successfully undertake the critical work of ensuring communities in NSW are prepared and can adapt to any flood, fire or natural disaster that happens. Whilst the states emergency services continue to lead the immediate response measures to natural disasters, such as issuing evacuation orders, the Authority will focus on the crucial tasks of long-term rebuilding and risk mitigation, i.e. focusing on what can be done to reduce the impacts of disasters in the first place. In this regard, one of the Authorities first priorities will be to prepare a State Disaster Mitigation Plan, through a combination of better planning controls and improved disaster preparation to reduce the cost and trauma of future events. Only time will tell, however, with an organisation like the Red Cross reporting that its Emergency Services were activated for 262 days last year, “their busiest year on record”, the next natural disaster is unfortunately just around the corner.

Quote: “You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.” Martin Luther King