



**BOURKE
SHIRE
COUNCIL**

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

Village Tours

Come the publishing of this Column, Councillors and Staff will have visited Louth and Wanaaring as part of the annual Community Consultation Meetings/Village Tours Program as organised by Council. Today we are in Enngonia and Fords Bridge with the Program rounding up next Thursday, 23 February 2023, with a visit to Byrock and then later that day, the consultation meeting for Bourke township being held at the Back O’ Bourke Conference Centre, commencing at 5.30pm. These consultation meetings and tours are a great opportunity for Councils elected representatives, Council staff and the community to come together to discuss matters relating to the various villages of Bourke Shire with the community able to provide input into the development of Councils 2023/2024 Operational Plan (ie Councils budget).

Council also takes the opportunity to provide those in attendance with an overview and update in respect of Councils current and future works schedules. I have always found these visits and meetings to be of great value and I know that Councillors who were able to attend also find them of significant value. I thank those Councillors who are able to attend for their time and also thank residents who come out and contribute towards the ongoing development of there respective villages.

At the Wanaaring Village Meeting, residents were naturally keen to hear of the construction timeframes for the further sealing of Wanaaring Road, following the recent announcement by the Minister for Regional Transport and Roads, The Hon Sam Faraway MLC of funding of a further \$5m for roadworks on this important roadway.

As I mentioned in a previous Column, the NSW Government has allocated \$500m to support all 128 councils across NSW to undertake urgent repairs to the road network across NSW which has been significantly impacted by severe flooding, storm damage and persistent wet weather events during 2022. This funding, as part of the Regional and Local Roads Repair Program (RLRRP), seeks to assist councils in addressing priority repairs and also deliver safer and improved journeys for communities and industry. Councils plans in respect of the expenditure of its allocation of \$4,476,112 under this program has also been discussed at village meetings, noting that for Bourke Shire, the total Road Network is 2455 km’s in length, comprising a Local Road Network of 1883 km’s and a 572 km Regional Road Network.

Macquarie Homestay

In January 2022, Council wrote a letter of support, on behalf of the Bourke Shire, as the Macquarie Homestay in Dubbo sought funding from the Federal Government under the Building Better Regions Fund that, if successful, would result in the construction of additional accommodation units at the very popular Homestay Facility. Unfortunately, as it turned out, with the change in Government at the Federal Level, the decision was made to abandon the Better Regions Fund, the only fund under which Homestay could be funded.

With Dubbo being the medical hub for the western area, patients are generally referred to Dubbo for specialist medical treatment, including to the recently opened Western Cancer Centre. In attending Dubbo for such services, patients require appropriate short-term accommodation. Opened in January 2019 with 17 units, Macquarie Homestay provides a culturally appropriate, safe and welcoming place for all people in the central west, north western and western NSW districts who travel on average 300-400kms to seek treatment. Treatments can include oncology, maternity, emergency, paediatric, orthopaedic, ENT, dialysis, gynaecology, urology, day surgery, tests and scans, specialist appointments, surgery, general admission to hospital, ICU, palliative, rehab, family support and so on. Residents of the Bourke Shire are regular, and grateful, users of the accommodation facility. Macquarie Homestay, however, is a victim of its own success, operating at an occupancy rate of 100% for over half of every month. In many months an occupancy rate in excess of 98% is experienced; On average, the facility turns away more than 3 bookings a day. It needs more units to be constructed.

With the removal of the Federal Government's Building Better Regions Fund last year, the required expansion was very much in jeopardy. I was delighted to read that the NSW Government will now contribute the \$2.5 million in required funding to make the expansion a reality. This will obviously be of great benefit to residents of the Bourke Shire as they attend Dubbo to access medical treatment. The \$2.5m in funding will allow Home Stay to build 26 new rooms and will largely accommodate cancer patients, freeing up the current rooms for patients and families with other medical needs. This is an excellent result for residents of Western NSW and I know that many people have worked very hard to see this funding a reality. Without naming names, to all involved, Bourke Shire thanks you.

Wild Dog Fence

As readers would know, the NSW Government has committed to extending the NSW Border Wild Dog Fence (commonly known as the dog fence) by up to 790 km. The commitment comes following a feasibility study (first published January 2019) that was commissioned by the Border Fence Maintenance Board and funded by Local Land Services. The study determined there would-be considerable benefits to be had by extending the fence by up to 440 km in the east adjacent to Mungindi and up to 350 km in the south to just short of the Murray River. The existing dog fence is approximately 583 km in length and erected along parts of the NSW/Queensland border and NSW/South Australian border. When the NSW Cabinet came to Bourke in November 2019, the issue of ongoing wild dog attacks on livestock was one of the major issues of concern put forward by landowners to the Premier and her Ministerial Colleagues. It's fair to say that with the impacts of COVID-19, drought and floods, coupled with unexpected finds during the assessment process and complex approvals requirements, the Wild Dog Fence project has been considerably delayed. Notwithstanding these unforeseen issues, the project has made substantial progress in a number of areas including the mapping of the proposed fence alignment; assessments for biodiversity and cultural heritage; procurement of a materials panel and construction panel, both of which involve businesses from Western and regional NSW, including a local Bourke business; engagement with local landholders and stakeholders, including the Aboriginal community and the construction of a 15 km priority pilot site.

Whilst the project team is working as hard and efficiently as possible to get the required approvals to allow construction to commence, I know that Fence Management are appreciative of landholders and stakeholders in the north of our Shire, and all those along the route of the fence for that matter, for their patience and understanding. Once constructed, the fence will be a major improvement to the viability of landowners in the area. Should you require further information regarding the NSW Wild Dog Fence Extension project, visit www.lls.nsw.gov.au/wdf or contact the project team on (02) 5852 1215 or wilddogfence@scs.nsw.gov.au.

Bus Trial

One funding announcement that I didn't mention in last week's Column, following the recent visit to Bourke by the NSW Minister for Regional Transport and Roads, the Hon Sam Farraway MLC, relates to funding by the NSW Government of a 12-month pilot intracommunity bus service for Bourke, known as Wilba. The pilot service is a pre-booked transport service that will operate within an 8km radius of Bourke (which includes North Bourke), utilising a minibus operating from 8.00am till 7.30pm Monday to Friday and from 9.00am till 2.00pm on Saturdays. With a full adult fare of \$2.30 for a trip of up to 3km's and \$3.30 for a 4-8km trip, prices are most reasonable.

Wilba is an in between of a bus and a taxi. It is more flexible than a bus because it is on-demand, and it is cheaper than a taxi because it is shared. Transport for NSW is rolling out the pilot and in doing so have engaged a private provider to supply and operate the minibus service which will commence on 27 February 2023. Further details will be available at www.wilba.com.au

This is an excellent initiative for Bourke, and like any service, I encourage the community to utilise it such that there is little option but for the Service to continue come the completion of the pilot and onwards.

Quote: "I know it wasn't OK and I'm sincerely sorry for the hurt I caused"- Tennis player Nick Kyrgios in a statement following pleading guilty to assaulting his former girlfriend having pushed her with sufficient force so that she fell down. Whilst the court dismissed the charges without conviction, no, it is never ok.