



**BOURKE
SHIRE
COUNCIL**

“From the
General Manager’s Desk”
30 March 2023”

Height of the Bourke Weir

One of the issues that Bourke Council has long advocated for is an increase to the height of the Bourke Weir in a bid to enlarge the capacity of the Bourke Weir Pool. As most residents would be aware, the capacity of the weir pool is currently such that once water ceases to flow over the weir, and there are no further inflows, the Bourke township has but 6 months of river water supply available to it. This limited availability of river water supply impacts significantly the economic development capability of our community. It is hard to fathom that despite the many hundreds of thousands of megalitres that flowed past Bourke during 2022, the water at the weir is now within 25 cm of water flow stopping with the community correspondingly close to going back onto water restrictions.....all within 3 months of the community being cut off from localities to the south and east of Bourke due to flood waters.

Over the year's Council representatives have attended numerous consultation sessions, met with relevant Ministers and departmental officers, and whilst there have been verbal commitments to an increased weir height, Council has seen little actual progress in this most important issue for our town. Council discussed this apparent lack of progress at its meeting back on 27 February 2023 and in doing so, resolved to write to the Federal Minister for the Environment and Water, the Hon Tanya Plibersek, MP and the NSW Minister for Lands and Water, the Hon Kevin Anderson, MP seeking formal clarification as to the status of the Western Weirs Strategy/Better Baaka Program and the resulting status of proposals to increase the height of the Bourke Weir.

With the NSW Government having been in caretaker mode since 3 March 2023 leading up to last week's state election, the NSW Minister requested the Acting CEO of the NSW Water Sector, Ms Amanda Jones, to respond to Council. In her response Ms Jones assured Council “that Bourke Weir is a high remediation priority for the NSW Government.” She advised that “upgrades to the Bourke Weir, as part of the Western Weirs project, have been incorporated into the Better Baaka program, a holistic, system-wide approach to regional water infrastructure planning and operations to address the issues facing the Darling- Baaka River system. The program reflects a greater focus on environmental outcomes in the Darling Baaka.”

Importantly she advised that “the strategic business case for the Western Weirs program was completed in November 2021” and further that “the NSW Government continues to work with the Australian Government on suitable funding arrangements to progress to a final business case.”

Whilst Council has yet to receive a response to its letter to the Federal Minister for the Environment and Water, the Hon Tanya Plibersek, MP, its fair to say that this issue is not one that Council is going to easily let go of.

Fish Deaths

NSW Government agencies including the Department of Planning and Environment (DPE), the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) and WaterNSW continue to respond to major fish death events on the Lower Darling-Baaka in the Menindee Lakes region.

Since mid-February fish deaths have been recorded upstream of Pooncarie, both in the main channel of the river and in off-channel wetlands and depressions, where fish became stranded as water levels dropped. Most of the dead fish are native Bony herring and non-native Carp, although increasing numbers of large-bodied native fish such as Murray cod and Golden perch are being documented. It is apparently unusual to see substantial numbers of Murray cod and Golden perch stranded due to flood water returning to rivers. This suggests that fish were avoiding the particularly poor water quality in the river channel during this period and were attracted to the higher quality water in the billabongs. Typically, it would be expected that Murray cod and Golden perch would return to the river before they are stranded in smaller channels.

The apparent cause of the fish kill is what's known as hypoxic blackwater. This is a naturally occurring phenomenon when large quantities of fish, bacteria, algae and other organic matter deplete the oxygen levels especially throughout the night when photosynthetic generation of dissolved oxygen by water plants and algae ceases. While the forecast is for lower temperatures over coming weeks, the risk of hypoxia is still high, as warmer water holds less oxygen than cold water, and fish have higher oxygen needs at warmer temperatures.

The current task being addressed at Menindee is cleaning up the massive number of dead fish. One can only imagine the smell at the site.

Trivia

Talking of clean ups, Friday 18 March 2023, was the 20th anniversary of when two (2) protestors in the dead of night scaled one of the sails of the Sydney Opera House to paint the wording NO WAR in large red paint at the top point of the tallest sail on this iconic building. Sentenced to nine months periodic detention and fined \$151,000, the malicious actions resulted in a new law which would see people who intentionally or recklessly damage the Opera House, face a jail term of up to seven (7) years. Where it gets interesting is that the removal of the red paint was undertaken by the Dubbo based company Techni-Clean. My understanding is that the exposure received from undertaking this onerous clean-up, certainly didn't hurt Techni-Clean as they went about successfully expanding their operations.

National Asbestos Awareness Campaign

Asbestosis (as-bes-TOE-sis) is a debilitating chronic lung disease caused by inhaling asbestos fibres. In cases where people are exposed to high levels of asbestos dust over a long period of time, some of the airborne fibres can become lodged within their alveoli — the tiny sacs inside lungs where oxygen is exchanged for carbon dioxide in the blood. The asbestos fibres irritate and scar lung tissue, causing the lungs to become stiff. This makes it difficult to breathe. As asbestosis progresses, more and more lung tissue become scarred. Eventually, the lung tissue becomes so stiff that it can't contract and expand normally.

Asbestosis symptoms can range from mild to severe, and usually don't appear until many years after initial exposure. It is a debilitating disease with people who worked in mining, milling, manufacturing, and installation or removal of asbestos products before the late 1970s being at the highest risk of asbestosis. Whilst large steps have been taken in reducing the number of Australians exposed to

asbestos, from 12 March 2023 till 10 April 2023 the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency is conducting a further phase of its successful National Asbestos Awareness Campaign. A major focus of the campaign is directed at homeowners who are undertaking renovations to their properties with the number of people undertaken home improvements ever increasing due to limited availability of tradies.

Before you start doing any home improvements yourself, always check if asbestos is present. You can do this by asking an asbestos professional for advice and have a sample tested, or assume the material contains asbestos & take the necessary precautions. If the asbestos material is in good condition do not disturb or damage it. If it is broken, weathered or if any renovation or maintenance work is likely to disturb or damage the asbestos, seek professional help to remove it. It could cost less than you think, on various levels.

Even if you're just doing minor repairs or maintenance on your home, always take care to avoid disturbing or releasing asbestos fibres. Maintain asbestos materials in good condition by using paint or other sealants, enclosures and capping. Never use high-pressure water or any abrasive process (e.g. scrubbing, sanding or grinding) to clean asbestos cement roofs or any other asbestos material. This can result in widespread contamination and an expensive clean-up. If you plan to cut a small hole into an asbestos-cement sheet, for example to install a cable, only use a hand saw or hand drill (or low-speed battery drill) and contain or capture any asbestos dust as close to the source as possible. You must also wear suitable personal protective equipment.

With many of the houses in Bourke dating back to pre-1980, I encourage all to be careful when dealing with asbestos products. For more information have a look at the following link:
<https://www.asbestossafety.gov.au>

Quote: "Members agreed to reconsider the case for a pause (in interest rate rises) at the following meeting, recognising that pausing would allow additional time to reassess the outlook for the economy," Reserve Bank of Australia minutes of its March Meeting.

Time will tell!