



**BOURKE  
SHIRE  
COUNCIL**

“From the  
General Manager’s Desk”  
13 April 2023”

### **Easter Festival Visitors**

Another successful Back O’ Bourke Easter Festival has come and gone. With absolutely beautiful weather across the entire weekend, the 2023 Festival was another great success. Events such as the Festival, however, just don’t happen. From the initial activity at 9.00am on Good Friday morning, being Paul Roe and his Cemetery Tour, followed closely by the ever-popular Easter Colour run, the ever-popular Rams v Barbarians Rugby Game on Saturday, through to the Back O’ Bourke Race Club – Harry Hart Memorial Picnic Races on Sunday and then the last Jandra Paddleboat cruise on mid Easter Monday afternoon, and an absolute myriad of other events over the weekend, so many people just pitch in to make sure the weekend is a success. To the many volunteers who assist in great numbers, a wholesome thank you. To the Council staff who worked hard to ensure our town was extra “clean-n-tidy” for the weekend and for undertaking the important behind the scene jobs like delivering a caravan here, chairs there, installing a PA at an event, making sure road detour signs are in place, closing streets, picking up rubbish post events, driving water trucks to spray colour run participants, organising buses, cleaning toilets, attempting to maintain some sort of order at the Easter Egg Hunt, and so on and so on, thank you to everyone involved.

### **Operational Plan Exhibition**

Don’t forget that Councils draft 2023/2024 Operational Plan (the budget) and associated documentation is currently on exhibition until 5.00pm Monday, 1 May 2023. The Plan is available for viewing at Councils Website ([www.bourke.nsw.gov.au](http://www.bourke.nsw.gov.au)) with a copy also available at the Council offices in Mitchell St, Bourke. Council is required to have considered any submissions received prior to adopting its annual Operational Plan. Such considerations will take place when a report on submissions is presented to Councils 22 May 2023 Ordinary Meeting. So, if you wish to have your say about where Council is proposing to spend funds for the upcoming new financial year, for consideration by Council, now is your opportunity.

### **Fire season extended**

I note that the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) has announced that with an increased risk of grass fires continuing across large parts of the state, the bush fire danger period has been extended in 44 local government areas across NSW. In this regard the danger period in the Bourke LGA has been extended for a further month till the end of April 2023. The danger periods have also been extended in the adjoining LGA’s of Brewarrina, Central Darling, Cobar and the Unincorporated Area to the west.

In announcing the extension, RFS Commissioner, Rob Rogers, made comment regarding the high fuel loads and warmer than average temperatures that currently exist across the State. He stated that “In March alone, firefighters have worked on more than 850 bush and grass fires burning over 66,000

hectares,” noting further that “Fire activity in March accounted for almost 50% of the hectares burnt across the whole fire season”.

Given the extension of the Bush Fire Danger Period in the Bourke Shire, fire permits are still required if you are planning to light a fire in the open during this extended time. In addition to a Permit being issued, you must notify neighbours and local fire authorities 24 hours before lighting up. With the prevailing dry conditions, it is vital when conducting a burn on your property it is safe to do so and make sure that you comply with the rules, even if you have conducted burns on your property for years. Please don't be a fire risk to our community, know your obligations if conducting burns and know the costs if you do the wrong thing, but most importantly, if a fire does get out of hand, make sure you report it immediately to Triple Zero (000).

A point made by Commissioner Rogers that I found most interesting related to people preparing their property in the event of bush and grass fires. In this regard, the Commissioner advised that RFS commissioned research shows that only one in two people in NSW had taken action to undertake the necessary preparations in response to the threat of bush and grass fire. I would urge all landholders and residents of the need to have a well-prepared property and importantly discuss their bush fire survival plan and know what they'll do if threatened by fire.

### **Roads to Recovery Funding**

With Bourke Shire covering a large area of 41,679 km<sup>2</sup>, roads are a significant areas of expenditure for Council. In 2018-19, councils across Australia spent \$8.3 billion on transport, primarily on roads. Whilst some road maintenance funding in Bourke is provided from the council's limited rate base, Council is very much reliant upon road funding provided by the Commonwealth and NSW governments. Unlike these levels of government, councils have no direct mechanisms to raise funds for road construction and maintenance such as road user charges, registration charges, or any road- or transport-related fees or charges. To this end, the Commonwealth Governments major roads program is known as the Roads to Recovery (R2R) Program.

This program was introduced by the Commonwealth Government as part of its 2001/2002 Federal Budget. It was the result of an extended campaign by the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) to seek funding from Federal Authorities to help councils address the maintenance backlog on local roads. In this regard councils had done a comprehensive body of work detailing what roads they had, their asset value, their life cycle and what funding was required to maintain them. The maintenance numbers were scary and well outside council's ability to fund them to achieve full asset maintenance. Faced with this data, some councils actually took the decision to return some of their potholed bitumen sealed local roads back to gravel to address the now identified funding shortfall. It was then Deputy Prime Minister, the Hon John Anderson who made the announcement as part of the Commonwealth Governments 2001/2002 Budget that all councils across the nation would receive R2R funding, with councils given the “discretion to determine their own road funding priorities.”

I don't have total funding provided to councils since the inception of R2R in 2001. However, between the 2013/2014 financial year to the 2023/2024 financial years the Commonwealth Government will have provided \$6.2 billion funding to local councils. I do know that in the initial year of the program (2001/2002), Bourke Shire received funding of \$758,000. Councils allocation in 2023/2024 will be some \$1.2m. In addition, in the past two (2) financial year's, Council has received additional funding totalling \$1.2m as part of the Drought Communities Programme Extension.

As good as R2R continues to be, ALGA works hard with the Commonwealth Government for required levels of funding. From a study released in 2010 into local road funding, it was estimated that to simply

maintain, rather than improve Australia's local roads, up to 2025, an additional \$1.2 billion annually is required. As stated by ALGA, "without this additional funding, underinvestment in local roads will continue. This funding shortfall hinders local and regional social and economic development, and ultimately affects the development and productivity of the nation." ALGA has recently called for the Federal Government to increase R2R funding by \$300 million per annum.

### **Bourke & District Cricket Association**

Congratulations are extended to the Louth Cricket Club 1<sup>st</sup> XI, who recently took out the Bourke and District Cricket Association Competition 2022/2023 Season Grand Final against the Two Waterholes side. After batting first, Louth scored an impressive 152 runs with Will Mitchell top scoring with a solid, and ultimately, a match winning knock of 61. Louth then proceeded to bowl Two Waterholes out for 147 needing all their skills in the field to avoid Waterholes reaching the 153 runs required to win. Andrew Bell finished with figures of 4/7 off 7 overs. Played at the picturesque North Bourke Oval, it was a great day for Bourke Cricket with a big crowd, including many kids, on hand to witness a game played in the right spirit honouring the traditions of cricket. At the end of the game, both sides had a barbecue and drinks together. It was great to witness the comradery and a great way for the season to finish on. To Louth's credit, it was their first premiership since 2008, a spell of 15 year's. Congratulations to all concerned for a most successful day.

**Quote: "Effective from day one of term 4 this year, there will be a compulsory ban on phones in NSW high schools."** Recently elected NSW Premier, Chris Minns - insisting that young people would be at risk of declining educational results without such a mobile phone ban.