



**BOURKE
SHIRE
COUNCIL**

“From the General Manager’s Desk” 6 July 2023

New Financial Year

The 2022/2023 Financial Year has come and gone with the new 2023/2024 Financial Year, which commenced last Saturday on 1 July 2023, bringing with it a raft of changes across the nation and state in terms of immigration, first home ownership schemes, stamp duty on property, family payments, increased payroll tax for large businesses, and changes to the Super Guarantee (SG) percentage rate, to name but a very few of the changes. In terms of the SG rate, payments by employers to the superannuation accounts of their employees increased from 10.5% to 11% on 1 July 2023. Change also occurs in Bourke as a result of Council having prepared, considered, determined a draft, exhibited such draft and then adopting, its 2023/2024 Operational Plan, ie its budget. Rates for the new financial year have increased by 3.7%, being the rate increase allowed for by IPART in their annual determination of NSW Councils. Whilst the IPART determination figure is well short of the current rate of inflation, circa 7%, Council is cognisant of the cost-of-living pressures that many in Bourke are currently experiencing.

Whilst I am sympathetic for those who have mortgage payments, noting the many extra thousands of dollars that interest repayments have increased by for many mortgagees, one side benefit is the increased interest rates for savings. As a large organisation that allocates funds for future maintenance and capital works and receives significant grant funds, Council holds a not insignificant amount of money in its reserves, all allocated for specific purposes, that it invests and earns interest on. Each month, a report is prepared by staff and submitted to Council which details the funds held in investments and the interest received. Prior to this time last year, when official interest rates were below 1%, the monthly reports in terms of Councils various investments were pretty sad reading. At that time, the average interest rate across 14 investments, totalling \$34.74m, was just 0.27%. Councils expected interest on investments for 2021/2022 was some \$110,000. From the Investment report that was presented to Councils June 2023 meeting, the average interest rate across the 17 investments held as at 31 May 2023, now totalling \$37.79m, had increased to 3.96%. Councils interest on investments for 2022/2023 is now estimated to be in excess of \$860,000. It is certainly a large increase in income over a short period of time.

Whilst there are undoubtedly investments in the marketplace that pay higher interest, Councils investments are undertaken in accordance with Local Government statutory requirements and Council’s Investment Policy and comprise Term Deposits lodged with the Commonwealth Bank of Australia and the National Australia Bank. These are very strong and highly rated financial institutions and investing with them brings little risk to investing “public monies.” Whilst not permitted regardless, there is little benefit in achieving a couple of higher points in interest just to see the public’s capital fettered away in some risky style investment. When it comes to “public money”, the conservative approach is the mantra.

Sewer Relining Works

Council has engaged Cleanway to complete various sewer relining works in identified areas in Bourke. The works commenced in June and the contractors will depart Bourke once the identified \$100,000 of works are complete. Two (2) examples of sewer lines being relined are the 200mm line which extends from the Spar Supermarket laneway up to the Warraweena Street Well and the line that runs from the Bourke Memorial Olympic Swimming Pool to the Victor Jackson laneway. This latter line is a 225mm diameter sewer line.

The process to reline the existing sewer pipes involves a very large truck that inserts a PVC sleeve into the existing pipe which is then expanded such that it moulds to and fits the inside lining of the pipe. This process is undertaken with steam and heat. As would be expected, the introduction of the new PVC lining reduces the capacity of the existing pipe, with such reduction being by some 5%. This is not of concern to Council, as apart from being common throughout the industry, the minor reduction in pipe capacity is well outweighed by the cost-benefits of not having to remove the existing pipes and then re-lay new pipes. In addition, relining works are expected to add between 50 – 80 years of lifespan to the existing pipes. As funding permits, Council will continue to reline sewers in Bourke as part of its Replacing Infrastructure Program.

Vet Shortage Enquiry

Over the years, residents of Bourke Shire have experienced periods of time, often protracted, where they have not had access to a vet in Bourke, having to instead travel to Cobar or Nyngan to access such veterinary services. I was interested to see that the NSW Parliament, via its Upper House Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, is currently seeking submissions for an inquiry it is undertaking into veterinary workforce shortages in New South Wales. The inquiry will investigate workforce shortages across all aspects of veterinary practice, including small and large animal practice, government, academia, research, industry and pathology. The inquiry was established following media coverage about burn-out in the veterinary profession. There are also reports of workforce shortages, and increased demands for veterinary care due to factors such as growing pet ownership.

The committee is very keen to hear from vets, vet nurses, pet owners, farmers, industry and others about the factors that may be impacting access to veterinary care. The Committee is also interested in learning about issues which may impact on the veterinary workforce in Australia, including aspects of the current legislative and regulatory framework. Full details in respect of the terms of the inquiry and how to make a submission are available at

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/Pages/inquiries.aspx>

Taylor Swift

I don't know much about the singer Taylor Swift, but I have been intrigued by the hype by fans following the announcement that she will be touring and performing at concerts in Sydney and Melbourne in the New Year. Initial tickets for her three (3) Sydney concerts went on sale last Monday. Apparently, these initial ticket sales were limited to those persons who held a particular brand of credit card but given the demand for the tickets, even before the sale went live at 10am, visitors to the website were told: "We're sorry. We're experiencing technical difficulties." With tickets for the general public having gone on sale last Friday, it will be interesting to see what sort of "feeding frenzy" erupts. When tickets went on sale for her tour in the US, there were massive issues with computer systems not coping with demand.

What really intrigued me the most, however, was the cost of the tickets to see her. In this regard, tickets ranged in price from \$79.90 to an eye watering \$1249.90 for a VIP ticket. This top-of-the-line ticket entitles the purchaser to an A Reserve Floor ticket for one concert; a special set of four (4) Taylor Swift prints; exclusive Taylor Swift VIP merchandise; the commemorative Taylor Swift - The Eras Tour - VIP Tote Bag; collectible Taylor Swift Pin, Sticker and Postcard Set plus Souvenir Concert Ticket and a special VIP Tour Laminated and Matching Lanyard. As they say, each to their own and how people spend their money is their business. I hope they all have a fantastic time. For me, I might download a song to see what the hype is all about!

Walgett General Manager

Congratulations to former RDA Executive Officer, Megan Dixon, who has been successful in being appointed to the role of General Manager at Walgett Shire Council. Megan has a background in economic development and local government. Like all Council General Manager roles, Megan will undoubtedly have her fair share of challenges. As an important component of the Far North West Joint Organisation of Councils, which comprise the Councils of Bourke, Cobar and Walgett, the Mayors and General Managers of the three (3) Councils regularly meet and discuss matters relating to the Far West with a view to improving the quality of life for all residents across the area of the Joint Organisation. In total the Joint Organisation covers an area of some 110,000 square kilometres. This area equates to some 13.5% of the total area of the State of NSW. I look forward to working with Megan in this space and continuing to also work with the General Manager of Cobar Council, Peter Vlatko.

Quote: "They're only getting started, this team. This team has created a foundation to their footy. They're just getting started. They're building." Victorious Queensland State of Origin Coach, Billy Slater after Game 2 of the Series last month.