



**BOURKE
SHIRE
COUNCIL**

“From the
General Manager’s Desk”

3 August 2023

Domestic Violence (DV)

Put simply, the level of domestic and family violence across NSW is a blight on our society. How often do we hear and read reports where a victim of domestic violence is murdered by their partner after a long period of domestic violence concerns? A recent focus by authorities in respect of domestic and family violence is addressing the difficulty that victims experience in coming forward to report violence. I read recently that research shows that it takes 25 instances of domestic violence before the victim is ready to report the crime to Police. With this reluctance to report in mind, and then the difficulty in achieving a successful prosecution against the perpetrator, NSW Police have developed an innovative new mobile phone application (an App) designed to discreetly document abuse and provide better access to support services. Unveiled recently, the ‘Empower You’ app has been developed to ensure better outcomes for victims of domestic and family violence across NSW.

‘Empower You’ includes a private diary, a coded emergency signal feature, which can also send victims GPS location, simple connectivity to Triple Zero for emergencies, and links local support services. With these features, victims can easily document abuse, which would be understandably difficult to recall when in distress or when it occurs over long periods of time. The app is “user friendly, intuitive, and interactive, while still having the best safety features for user privacy and discretion” according to NSW Police Domestic and Family Violence Portfolio Owner, Assistant Commissioner Stuart Smith. He said that “it has inbuilt features to keep it private on any mobile, including passcodes and quick lock, and has a modest-looking icon that’s designed not to alert perpetrators.” The diary feature allows a victim to collect their thoughts – including photos of injuries and property damage, and screenshots of emails or messages – and document an incident when it happens, no matter how minor or whether they report it to Police at that time. “This is especially important in terms of coercive control, where we know a victim often feels helpless, so with ‘Empower You’, the abuse is clearly demonstrated, and the power comes back to the victim,” said Commissioner Smith.

The ‘Empower You’ app is available in the Google Play Store and the Apple App Store, and NSW Police officers have QR codes on their MobiPOL devices to link to the app in the stores to download. Victims of domestic and family violence can also seek advice and services by contacting 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732) or visiting: <https://www.1800respect.org.au>. Reports of domestic and family-related crime or abuse can be made by contacting or attending your local Police station. In an emergency or life-threatening situation, contact Triple Zero (000). Anyone with information relating to domestic and family-related violence is urged to contact Crime Stoppers: 1800 333 000 or <https://nsw.crimestoppers.com.au>. Information is treated in strict confidence.

Déjà vu

The Cambridge Dictionary defines déjà vu as “that strange feeling that in some way you have already experienced what is happening now.” I had my own déjà vu moment recently when I opened a link to a Local Government related publication which had as its heading, “Tasmanian Premier declares: ‘there will be no forced amalgamations.’” The heading rapidly took me back to 2015 and 2016 when the NSW State Government was in the throes of progressing the amalgamation of numerous NSW Councils and, at the same time, attempting to progress its Far West Initiative, all as part of its “Fit for the Future” Agenda. Ultimately the Far West Initiative evaporated, thankfully, in favour of the formation of non-compulsory Joint Organisations. For Bourke Shire, it is a member of the Far North West Joint Organisation (FNWJO), one of the more successful Joint Organisations to be operating across Regional NSW. With a small membership of only three (3) Council, the FNWJO has a project focus in respect of its operations and a vision to be “a vast region of diversity and opportunity that cares for its people and environment.”

One of the projects that the JO is currently commencing to implement, following the receipt of government grant funding, is the pursuit of innovative projects that will progress energy management and net zero outcomes for the FNWJO Region. With the Australian government having released its Long-Term Emissions Reduction Plan to achieve a net zero emissions economy through a technology-based approach, whilst protecting relevant industries, regions and jobs, by 2050, the JO’s project is most timely. To progress this project, the JO has engaged a Project Officer for a 12-month period. This officer will be responsible for delivering a Regional Energy Management and Net Zero Plan that encompasses a diverse range of projects including the preparation of business cases, running regional procurements, delivering community education programs and working with FNWJO member councils to identify innovative solutions to common problems.

2023 Referendum

I recently wrote in my Column (20 July 2023) that in readiness for the upcoming national referendum on “THE VOICE”, the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) is encouraging people to enrol to vote or check their details online at www.aec.gov.au to ensure people above 18 years of age have their say. More recently the Commission (AEC) has reported some fantastic, possibly best in the world, enrolment figures.

The AEC is advising that as at 30 June 2023 the estimated national voting enrolment rate is 97.5%. These figures are up from 97.1% since the end of 2022 and up from 89.7% in 2010. With these numbers, the 2023 referendum will have the best base for democratic participation than any federal electoral event in Australia’s history. In terms of Indigenous enrolment, the national rate is estimated at 94.1%. This figure is above 90% for the first time and is up from 74.7% since 2017 and 84.5% since the end of 2022. This means that 60,000 more Indigenous Australians have enrolled since the end of 2022. Pleasingly, every state and territory has improved their Indigenous enrolment rates significantly.

From my perspective as General Manager, I am not here to push a position regarding the outcome in which way the result of an election or referendum goes. Rather, I consider promoting how people can have the opportunity to have their say, is most important.

Rising Insurance Costs

As part of the Agenda for Councils July 2023 meeting, a report was submitted regarding Council’s Annual Risk Management Program for 2023/2024. Council holds insurances in respect of 14 categories to provide a comprehensive level of cover in relation to its various activities and in this regard, an annual

review in terms of identifying exposure to risk and the extent to which risks can be insured is undertaken.

The interesting issue is the increases in insurance costs this year. Councils total premiums for its various classes of insurance excluding Public Liability, Property and Workers Compensation for 2023/2024 is \$247,785. This is 9.05% more than the premium paid in 2022/2023. For Public Liability insurance, Council is a member of the Statewide Liability Mutual Scheme. Statewide Liability Mutual is an organisation set up to provide public liability insurance cover to Local Government through a “pooling” arrangement. Statewide is able to negotiate renewal terms for the “pool” through various London Underwriters. Council’s contribution for 2023/2024 is \$145,360, an increase of 7.5%. For its Property coverage, Council is a member of the Statewide Property Mutual Scheme. This scheme provides Council with industrial special risk type cover for all of its properties. The majority of councils in NSW are members of the scheme with Council’s property premium for 2023/2024 being \$296,620. This is 12.48% more than the premium paid in 2022/2023. Certainly, the past twelve months has seen the global insurance market continue to harden, impacted by catastrophic losses, which in 2020 saw unprecedented fires, and then in 2021 and 2022 communities severely impacted by flooding and storms.

In terms of Councils Workers Compensation insurance, it has been placed with StateCover Mutual Limited since 2003. This scheme has been developed through an initiative of Local Government New South Wales and is a specialised Workers Compensation insurer for Local Government only. Workers Compensation premiums will be dependent upon a combination of Council’s previous claims history and actual claims submitted during each financial year. Council is awaiting advice from StateCover as to the 2023/2024 estimate.

Quote: “Our preference is to come over here and win the Ashes. Retaining it is nice, but we’re fully focused on trying to get the win. Whatever happened here doesn’t change the way we look at The Oval next week.” – Pat Cummings, reflecting on retaining the Ashes.