



**BOURKE
SHIRE
COUNCIL**

**“From the
General Manager’s Desk”
10 August 2023**

New National Park

I was disappointed to learn of the purchase by the NSW Government of another significant parcel of land in the far west area of the State to be utilised for the purposes of a National Park. The recent purchase of the 37,422-hectare Comeroo Station aggregation at Yantabulla by the NSW Government, follows the acquisition in February 2023 of the 437,394-hectare Thurloo Downs, located between Bourke and Tibooburra. These purchases add to the existing NSW National Parks owned and operated land portfolio in the Bourke Shire. These comprise Brindingabba, Gunabooka and Toorale National Parks and Ledknapper and Nocolèche Nature Reserves, located east of Enngonia and south of Wanaaring, respectively. Whilst very much understanding that the sale of any parcel of land to whomever is the vendor’s right, the impact of the ongoing purchase by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of prime agricultural land, and the subsequent elimination of pastoral operations, surrounding Bourke is a concern for Council.

In terms of the land purchase, the aggregation of the properties of Comeroo, Muttawary and Maranoa, is located some 150km north-west of Bourke in the Yantabulla district of Bourke Shire. NPWS have advised that the acquisition of Comeroo is part of a major public-private conservation initiative that will protect a combined area of 101,725 hectares – linking 2 national parks, Comeroo and Brindingabba (33,903 hectares), and 2 properties with conservation agreements with the Biodiversity Conservation Trust Naree (14,400 hectares) and Yantabulla (16,000 hectares). According to NPWS, Comeroo protects “one of Australia’s most important wetlands-9,660 hectares of the Yantabulla Swamp. Yantabulla Swamp is a mosaic of channels and wetlands in the Cuttaburra basin connecting 2 iconic rivers-the Bullo and the Paroo rivers. The area is considered the healthiest floodplain system in the Murray Darling Basin.” NPWS further advise that the wetlands are home to up to 50,000 waterbirds and further supporting up to 13 threatened species. In addition to the floodplains and wetlands, the properties comprise grasslands, stony desert shrublands and gibber plains and woodlands of poplar box and desert bloodwood.

With an estimated 12-month period for the transition of the properties from the ownership of the Sharpe family to National Parks, the yet to be named park will be promoted as an important stop for visitors across the rapidly expanding network of western New South Wales national parks, with the new park expected to be open to the public in late 2024. Interestingly, once Comeroo and other recently acquired lands are reserved, the NSW national park estate will cover over 8.24 million hectares, which is over 10.3% of the area of NSW.

The Sharpe family has held Comeroo since 1919. Bruce Sharpe has been a strong supporter of the maintenance of the Yantabulla Hall and has interacted with Council staff in a professional manner in progressing matters relating to the Hall. Notwithstanding Councils concerns, best wishes are extended to the Sharpe family for their future endeavours.

2023/2024 Volunteer Grants

Member for Parkes, the Hon Mark Coulton is encouraging community groups in the Parkes electorate to apply for a share of \$66,225 in funding to support the work of their volunteers. Interested eligible organisations in the electorate can visit Mr Coulton's website, www.markcoulton.com.au to obtain further information and download an Expression of Interest form for submission to his office by 5pm on Friday 8 September 2023.

NBN School Student Broadband Initiative

Another matter that staff from Mark Coulton's office brought to my attention is the recently announced program titled the School Student Broadband Initiative (SSBI). The SSBI is an Australian Government program to support students that do not have access to the internet at home. The program aims to boost educational opportunities by providing up to 30,000 eligible Australian families with school aged children (K-12) with free nbn-powered broadband internet at home for an initial 12 month period.

To be eligible for the program, families must have a child living at home that is enrolled in an Australian school in 2023; not have an active nbn network internet service at home (having a mobile internet service does not affect eligibility); be referred by a nominating organisation (of which Mr Coulton is); and lastly, live in premises that can access the nbn network. The program is not means tested, so if you have school children and don't have an active NBN connection please give consideration to lodging an application.

To nominate, it's a matter of contacting Mark Coulton's Moree office, Leah is the best person to speak to and the contact phone number is 02 6751 1251. Alternatively, you can email Marks office as follows: Mark.Coulton.MP@aph.gov.au with the following information: student name and school; the name of primary contact point for the family; contact details of the primary contact; and the home address where the connection will be installed.

It is important that consent is obtained from the family to provide their personal information to nbn. Upon receiving the required information, Mr Coulton's office will submit such information to the nbn Government Relations Unit who will: (a) contact the family (email, call or text) to provide notice of nbn's privacy policy and that their personal information will be managed in accordance with that policy; and (b) respond to Mr Coulton's office within two (2) business days to confirm if the family is eligible or not. For families who are eligible, nbn Government Relations will generate a printable voucher which will be sent to Mr Coulton's office who can then provide it to the recipient in person, or via email. Once received, the voucher can be redeemed by the family at a participating retail service provider listed on the voucher.

Electricity Bills

Much has been written by many as to the current state of the electricity industry and the staggering level of electricity bills that residents and businesses are receiving. The Australian Government in its 2023/2024 budget announced cost of living relief relating to electricity when it announced energy bill relief for low-income households & small business. A joint initiative between the NSW & Australian governments, there will be a one-off rebate of \$500 for eligible households and a one-off rebate of \$650 for those eligible small businesses that use greater than 100MWh. Not everyone is eligible for the payment, with payment being automatic if electricity customers are on the Low-Income Household rebate. If you're an electricity customer and are not currently on the Low-Income Rebate, here is the link for you to check your eligibility, just in case: <https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/transaction/apply-for-the-low-income-household-rebate-on-supply-customers>

In terms of small business, the rebate will be automatically applied through their retailer (excluding those working from home). More information is available from:

<https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/households/rebates-grants-and-schemes/national-energy-bill-relief>

Sheep and Goat Electronic Identification

As primary producers in our Shire would be aware, sheep and farmed goat industries and Government, both State and Federal, have agreed to transition towards mandatory electronic identification (eID). For information, a farmed goat is defined as, “any breed or type of goat that is not a harvested rangeland goat, which is managed or semi-managed on a property and is subject to animal husbandry procedures and managed breeding programs.” The NSW Government, via the Rural Assistance Authority, has now released details in respect of its Sheep and Goat eID rebate scheme to offset the costs of purchasing and installing electronic identification tagging systems. Saleyards, stock and station agents, primary producers and processors may be eligible for the rebate. In this regard, rebate applications for saleyards and stock and station agents opened on 1 August 2023 whilst primary producers and processors will be able to apply from 3 October 2022. Guidelines have been issued for the rebate program for processors and saleyards that will see, in respect of processors for example, a rebate of 50% of the cost of purchasing and installing eID equipment, up to a maximum of \$44,400 and \$52,000 for small and medium processors respectively. In terms of eID equipment to be acquired, these include eID readers (panel or handheld); eID hardware (computers, laptops, tablets); infrastructure for connectivity between eID hardware; and the purchase, installation and training for software connected to eID infrastructure. It will be interesting to see the level of rebates available to producers. For further information, go to <https://www.raa.nsw.gov.au> and search sheep and goat id.

Road Condition Reports

With the majority of roads within the Shire being unsealed, when it rains, these unsealed roads are all closed, and a Road Condition Report is emailed to a multitude of rural residents within the Shire. A copy of the report is also made available on Council’s website (<https://bourke.nsw.gov.au/engineering/road-conditions/>). Council interacts with adjoining landowners as to the condition of the various roads and then issues updated Reports having regard to such information.

Council on behalf of the community, expends considerable funds maintaining roads. Valuable resources are wasted repairing damage done by vehicles using closed, wet roads. Offenders may be prosecuted and be held responsible to pay for any damage caused. The catch cry is, “If it’s wet forget it!” If you require further information as to whether a road is closed or opened, please contact 02 6830 8000 or after hours on 0419722055.

Quote: "Full implementation of the (Murray Darling) Basin Plan will not be possible by June 30, 2024"- MDBA chair, Sir Angus Houston, in advice to federal Environment and Water Minister, the Hon Tanya Plibersek.